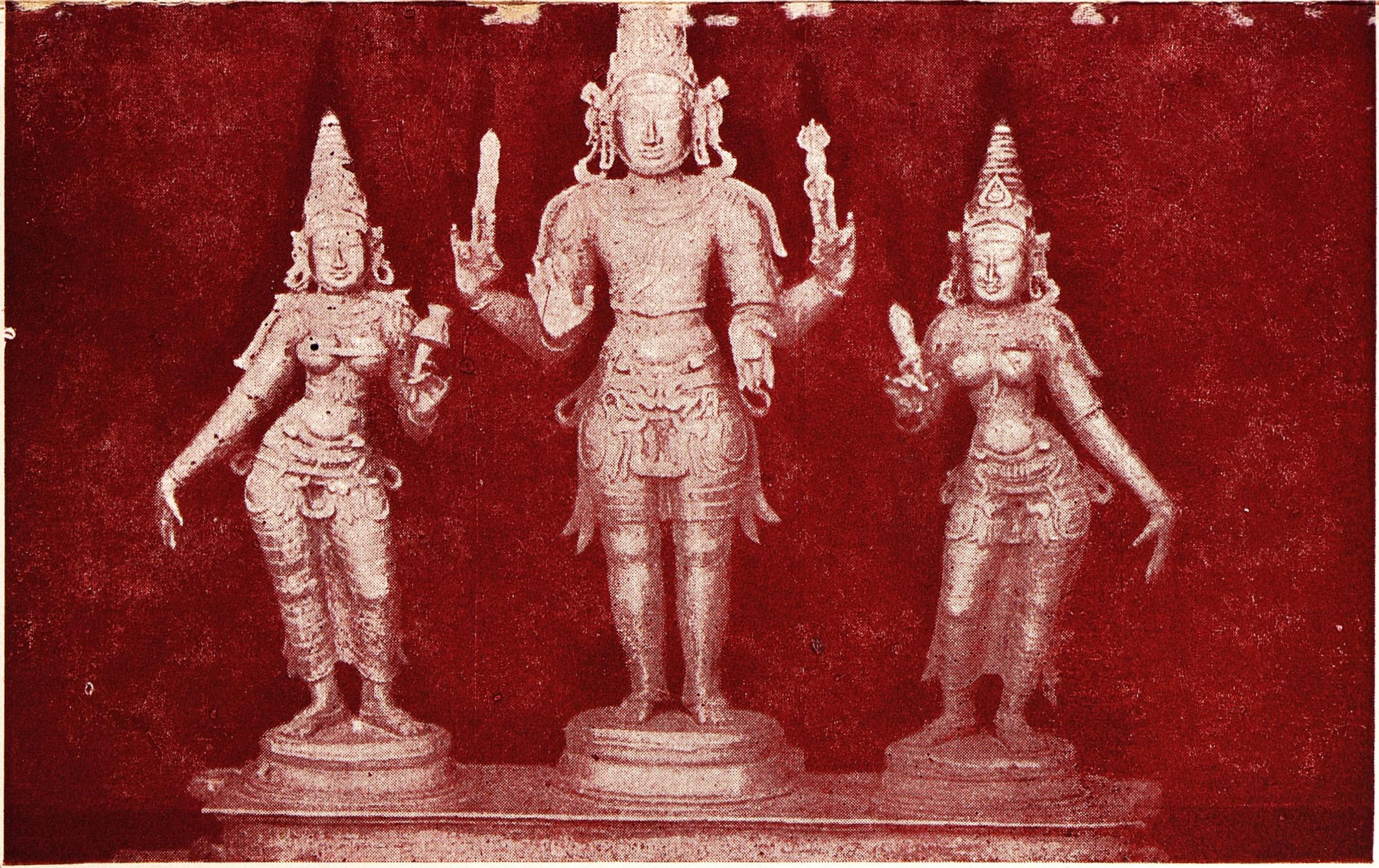
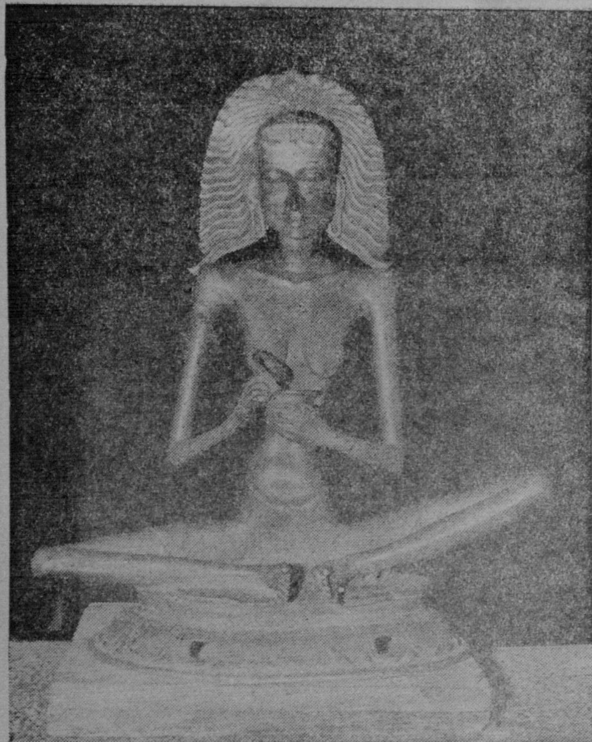
FESTIVALS OF TAMIL NADU

M. ARUNACHALAM

PEPES INTO TAMIL CULTURE - 3

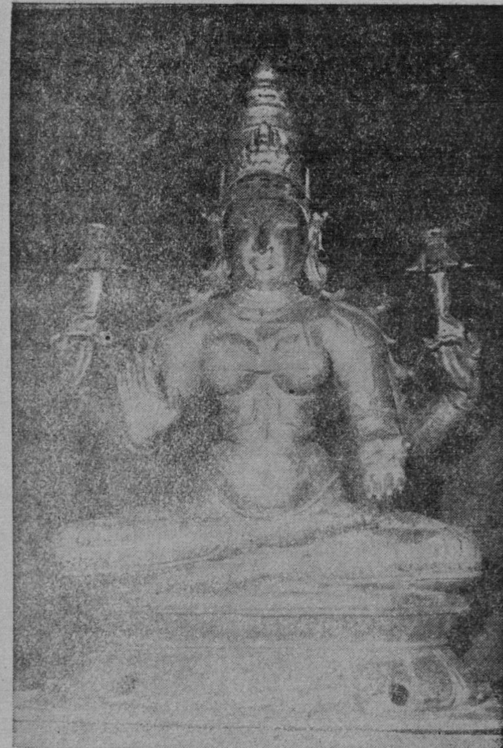


Lord Muruka with Valli and Devasena Tiru Alankadu, Tanjavur District. - page 78

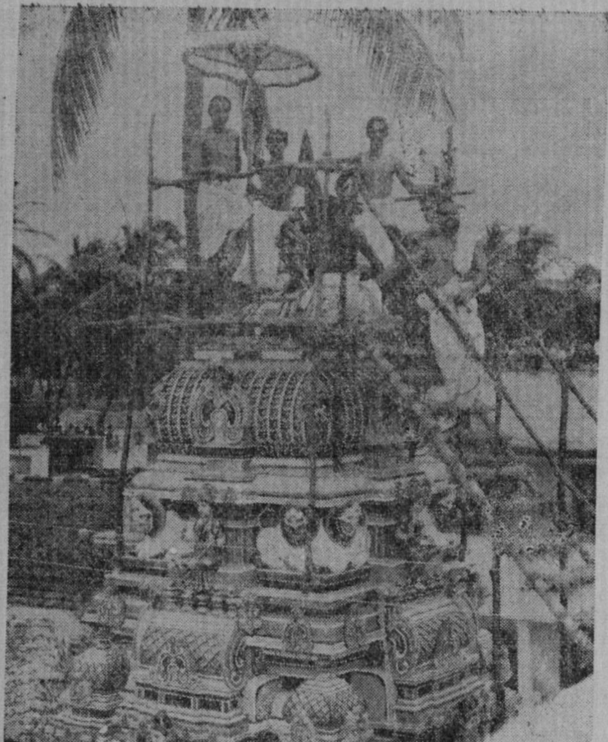


Karaikkal Ammaiyar - page 87.

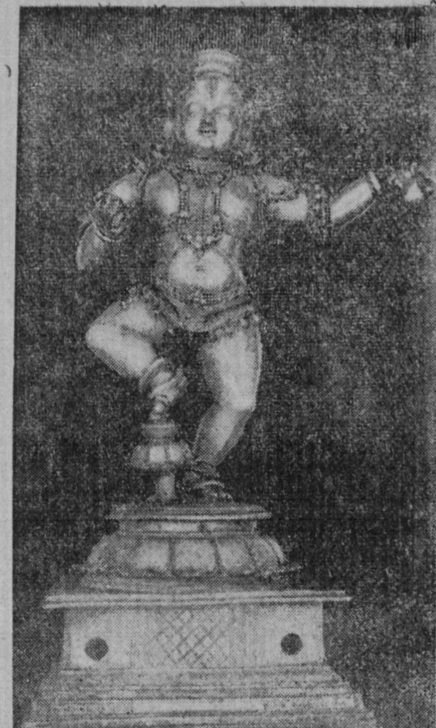
Courtesy : French Institute of Indology, Pondicherry.



Lakshmi at Gangai konda Cholapuram-
page 100.



Kumbhabhishekam (Samprokshana) in the Srivilliputhur Vishnu temple - page 290.
Courtesy : French Institute of Indology, Pondicherry.



Balakrishna - page 133.
Courtesy : French Institute of Indology, Pondicherry.



Sarasvati of the Silpa Sastras (Gangai konda Cholapuram A.D. 1030) - page 146.



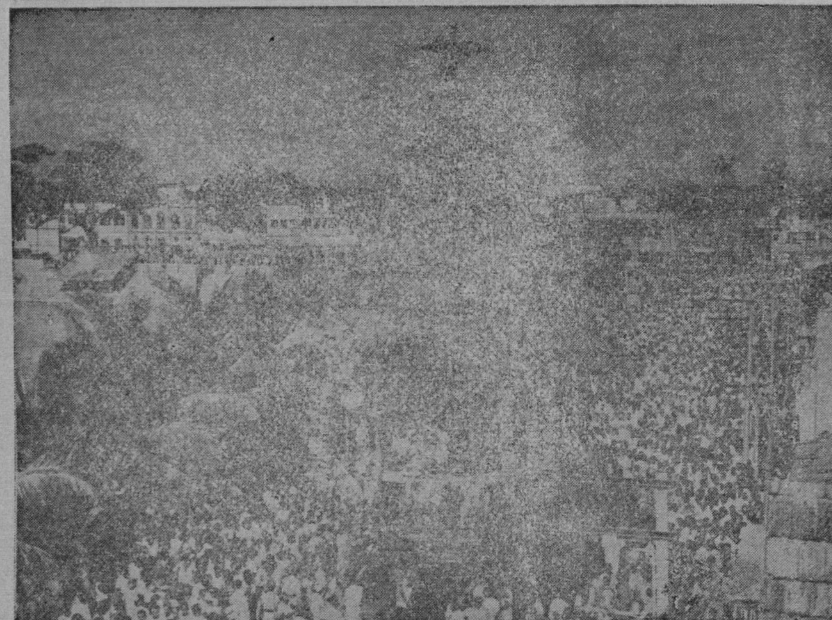
Chandesa - Gangai konda Cholapuram - Lord Siva winding His own garland on the crown of Chandesa - page 288.



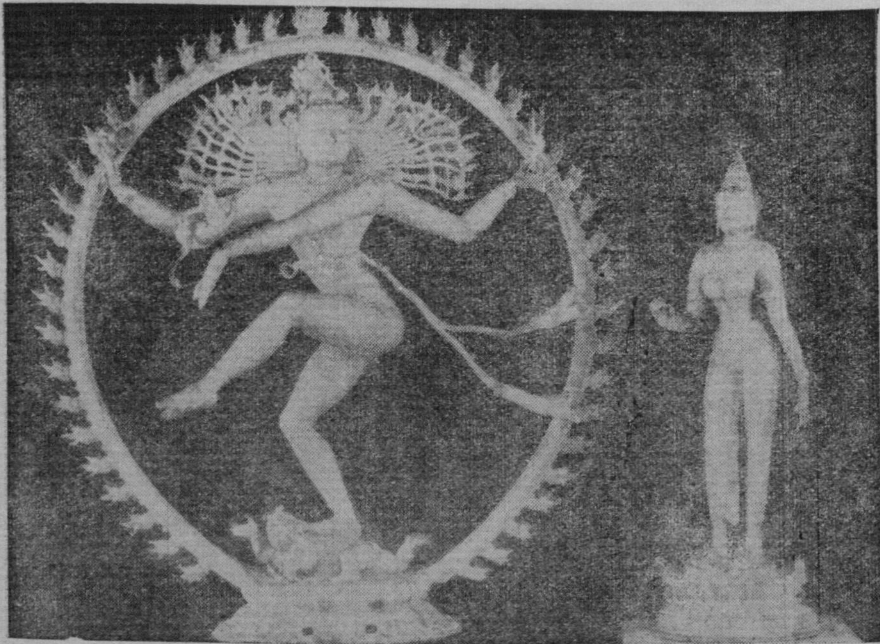
Lord Ganesa— Tiruttani Virattanesvar Temple - page 111.



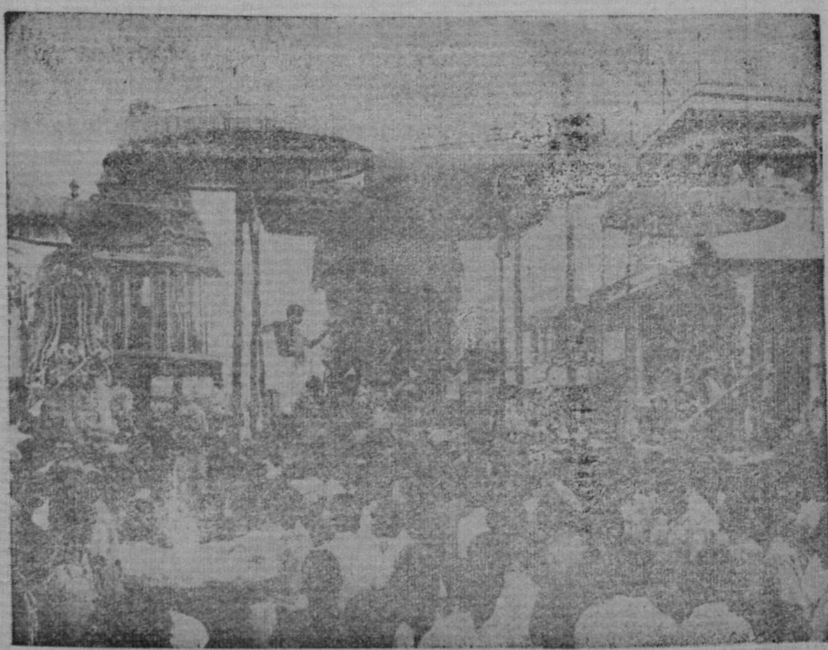
Lord Ganesa Valampuri Vinayaka - page 111. Courtesy: French Institute of Indology, Pondicherry.



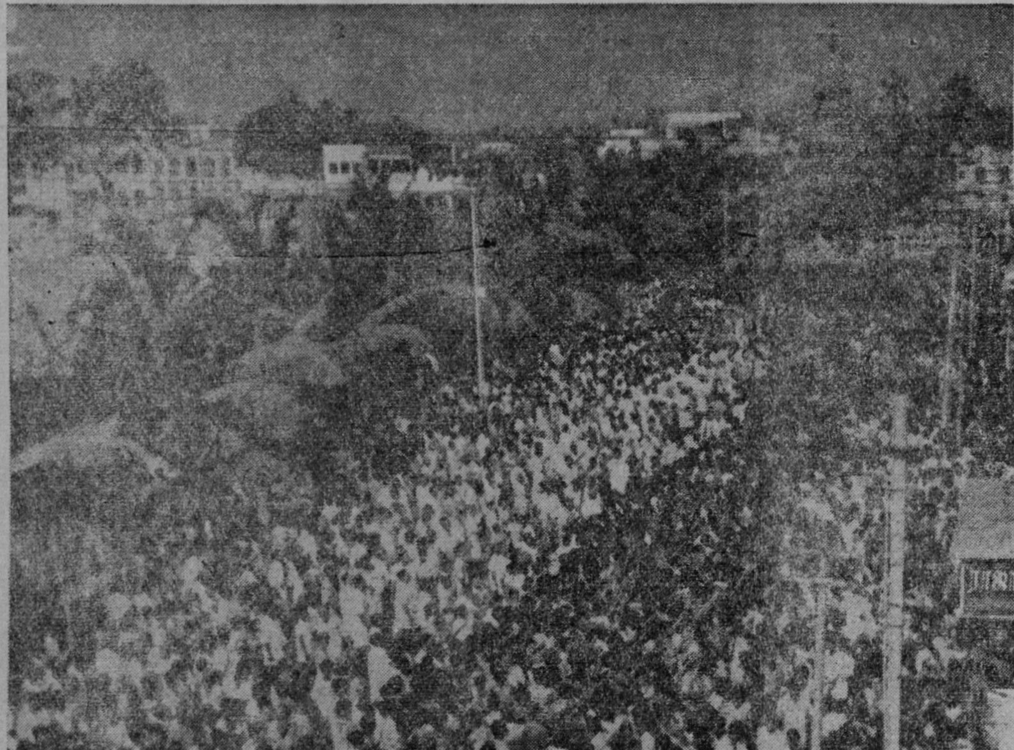
Mylapore - Car festival-Arupathumuvar - page 294.



Ananda-tandavam of Lord Nataraja with Sakti Sivakamasundari by his side - page 194.



Murthi's from the various temples converging on the Mahamagham tank - pages 260 - 2.



Another view of Arupathu Muvar festival



Aiyanar (Harihara putra)

with his two consorts Pūranā and Pushkala

PEEPS INTO TAMIL CULTURE - 3

FESTIVALS OF TAMIL NADU

M. ARUNACHALAM

Gandhi Vidyalayam

Tiruchitrambalam - Tanjavur District.

1980

First Edition : 2-10-1980

Rupees Forty

Gandhi Vidyalayam

Tiruchitrambalam-609 204

Novel Art Printers, Madras-600 014.

CONTENTS

Festivals of Tamil Nadu

BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

An Introduction to the History of Tamil Literature

A Primer of Tamil Literature

A Chronology for Tamil Literature

Festivals of Tamilnadu

Folk-songs of Tamilnadu

Ballad Poetry

Education in Ancient Tamilnadu

Worship in the Agamas

Guru Jnana Sambandhar of Dharmapuram

Outlines of Saivism

Harijan Saints of Tamilnadu

Women Saints of Tamilnadu

The Siddha Cult in Tamilnadu

The Sasta Cult in Tamilnadu

The Kalabhras in Pandinad and their Impact on its History and Culture

IN TAMIL

History of Tamil Literature-11 Volumes published

The Romance of Words

Essays on Tiruvacakam

Studies in Tiru Isaippa

Ilampuranar

Kumariyum Kasiyum

Talattu Ilakkiyam

Tattuva—Praksam with gloss

PREFACE

No apology is needed for bringing out a volume on the festivals of Tamilnadu. The Tamils have a glorious and continuous heritage of classical literature and culture which goes back to a period two thousand and five hundred years. They are reputed the world over as great temple builders. And what are temples if not seats of festivals? Classical Tamil Literature is said to be of three divisions, *Iyal*, *Isai* and *Natakam*, namely poetry, music and dance. Music and dance are accompaniments to any celebration of festivals. They are even prescribed as symbols of honour in a temple worship and festival-*gita*, *vadya*, *nirutta-music*, vocal and instrumental, and dance, out of a total of sixteen such symbols of honour (the *shodasa upachara*).

This is no doubt a book of Hindu festivals. The festivals here dealt with mostly relate to India, but are special to Tamil nadu. All the festivals detailed here are ancient, having been celebrated probably over a period of more than twenty centuries. Christian and Muslim festival days are common not only to India but to other countries in Asia, Africa and Europe, as these two religions are extensively followed outside India. To-day we are having a spate of foreign scholars and tourists visiting India and they visit us certainly not to know Christianity and Islam as practised in India, but to know Hinduism, its society and its ancient civilization, is philosophy and culture, its institutions, and the way of life of its people and so on. Hence I believe I am justified in confining myself only to the festivals of Hinduism here, in this book of Tamilnadu festivals.

Occasionally, festivals in the other regions of India may be seen to be elaborately dealt with here; though these are outside the scope of the work, yet some of them have important common features with Tamilnad celebrations, and it may be an advantage to learn how other people react to our own festive occasions. Some of them are given in detail. Examples are *Raksha Bandhanam* (mostly north India), *Onam* (Kerala) and *Holi* (again north India). There are yet some other Tamilnad

festivals where some idea of how they are celebrated elsewhere is also given; examples are *Dipavali* in Kerala, *Durga puja* in Bengal, *Ganesa Chaturthi* in Maharashtra and so on. These may help towards a better understanding of even our own festivals.

There are three aspects to every festival in the land. The irst is the ritualistic aspect – the various steps of its celebration, whether it be in the home or in the temple, the performance of a puja, preliminary arrangements etc.

The second is the legend aspect - the ancient stories which had grown round it, which had caused the origins of the festival, the benefits attained by some who celebrated it early in the history of the society, and so on.

The third is the philosophical or esoteric aspect which gives significance to the celebration and which has kept it alive through so many centuries. In many, the philosophical aspects may not be fully explicit, but a social significance may be apparent.

An attempt is here made to explain the significance of some of the obscure festivals and observances such as the Adippuram festival, Akshaya Trithiyai, Mahalaya Amavasya etc. The romantic and story aspects are well explained in most cases.

Normally it is not worth while to question or change established conventions. We in Tamilnad have a way of celebrating great people. One way is to celebrate the birth day, while another is to celebrate the day of passing away. The Vaishnavas celebrate the day of birth, of their Alvar and Acharyar, while the Saivas celebrate the day of passing away of their Nayanmar and Acharyar. (The rationale behind this has been explained in the appropriate place - page 316). These have all been fixed and cannot be questioned or changed now.

Mahatma Gandhi was born on 2nd October 1869 and, after he became the champion fighter in the Independence struggle, this day was celebrated as a national festival day during his life time. Even after his death (30th January 1948, a day celebrated later as the Sarvodaya day) the birth day

continues to be celebrated as a greal national holiday and the day of celebration for him has not been changed.

The festivals seem to constitute in a sense the eternal religion of India, particularly Tamilnadu. We need not know when the celebration of festivals by society or the state started. Saint Tirujnanasambandhar mentions a series of monthly festivals for the twelve months which were popular in his day (the seventh century). Most of them continue to this day almost unchanged both in the manner of celebration and in their significance. Festivals are the outward social expression of the communal joy of the people and they have helped to retain the best in the past culture and by the celebrations in the present, hand it down to the future generations. Festivals, mostly conservative, do not lend themselves easily to changes but continue to be rigid and the very rigidity opens up as it were a window for us to have a peep into the past.

Mode of observance of festivals has not changed. Lamp, incense, camphor, fragrant flowers, sandal, turmeric and kumkum with the everpresent betels, plantain fruits and coconuts are there, both in the domestic festivals and in the temple festivals. Instead of the ancient oil lamps, we may have electric lamps but yet, the oil lamp is there if not in the centre, at least in a corner symbolically. Camphor might have been introduced in to our country some where about the 4-6th centuries A.D. in the place of an oil lamp for waving before the deity (*aradana*). But the others are unchangeable and irreplaceable. The *kolam* and festoons are part of the decorations for any festival. Baths, a personal discipline of fasting, vigil in some cases, bath in the rivers or the sea, circumbulation, tying of the piece of yellow string round the neck or the wrist, new clothes in some cases, and the special food offerings which are special for each occasion - all together have kept up further a continuity of the ancient culture and have helped to keep alive the glow and glamour through many centuries, even amidst the greatest gloom and darkness caused by foreign aggression and suppression. The songs, kummi and dance have also made their own contribution in the preservation of that culture.

So we may say that the festivals by themselves constitute a religion, an eternal religion for the different societies.

The average Tamilian, as indeed the average Indian, has a worshipful attitude towards the Supreme Intelligence, as manifest in the five elements earth, water, fire, air and ether, the Sun and the Moon, and the Individual. (The eight are called in Saivism the *Ashta murta* or the eight manifest forms of Siva). Hence his attitude of reverence to all things-say, to the sea, the river, the plant, and the animal. The sensible person does not worship ghosts or goblins, does not worship minor evil *devatas*; he pays homage no doubt to departed ancestors out of a sense of respect and gratitude. All these elements are manifest in the various festivals. Rivers are worshipped as sacred waters, the sun is worshipped as the giver of all life and bounty, and plants are worshipped as *Sthala Vriksha* (sacred trees attached to shrines) and ancestors are given due homage. Many festivals detailed in the following pages will indicate the homage done to these categories. All these call for an expression of piety and devotion in worship, fasting, vigils, offerings of food and flowers, and gifts to men of God and the sharing of food with the labourers and the poor, and a deep fellow feeling with all creation. Festivals by their very nature are sources of great rejoicing for all concerned.

The book is divided into the three parts. The first is a general introduction to the festivals and their celebration in the home and the temple, their classification and their value. The second part deals with all the celebrations month by month beginning from the Tamil month of Chitrai (April 14 to May14) and ending with the month of Panguni (March to April). The third part deals with some other festivals which had not been dealt with in the second part. An extensive account of the Kumbhakonam Mahamagham festival is given here in the opening pages of this section (page 266) although the subject is just mentioned under the Masi magham festival (page 233-4), because of the great importance and attraction which it has to people all over Tamilnad and because it is not a monthly festval occuring once a year but occurring once in twelve years. The next festival occurs on 1—3—1980.

Additional notes are provided in Appendix 1. There are some further points relating to the respective festivals given in parts I and II; they are given here and are to be read along with them in continuation of the relevant matter on the pages indicated. Appendix 2 gives here in original the Tamil sources in the form of Tamil quotations, corresponding to the passages mentioned in the body of the text in the appropriate page. These have been given here partly because it is our belief they will be enjoyed by the Tamil knowing readers, who may also like to read them in the Tamil language and partly also because I was unable to resist my own joy in recounting them in the book. Appendix 3 is a table of the Tamil months with the corresponding months in the *Saka* era, the zodiacal reckoning and the English names of the Roman calendar.

A glossary of the Tamil and Sanskrit words occurring in the book is appended.

During the years 1947 to 1970 when I was running the Gandhian National Education Centre in my place Tiruchitrambalam, a remote rural area, it was a matter of religion with us to celebrate all the festivals on the respective days. On an average we were celebrating about fifteen days in a month, which included the anniversary days of Nayanmar Alvar, and other saints, poets and eminent national heroes including thl festive days of all the other religions. Our main purpose was to instil in our educators at the elementary and high school levels a pride in the national life and in the national culture. No student passed out of our school without knowing something about the Tamilnad festivals, the All-India festivals, the Anniversary days of our great men at the Tamilnad and the Als India levels, and a little about the religions other than the Hindu. The Gandhian National Education had given us the spirit of integration long before the dawn of India's Independence, and it is that spirit of integration which has enabled me to write down these few accounts of the festivalse These constitute only a small fraction of the celebrations in our schools.

The whole book has been prepared with the background of the Kaveri area and its culture and that too at a particular stratum of society. Occasionally one may notice peeps into

Madras also here. This is quite natural because one can not get out of his own early upbringing and the simple joys and pleasures the environment gave him in the early periods.

P.V. Jagadisa Aiyar, Manager of the Archaeology department of the Government of India in Madras, had published a book on the South Indian Festivals in 1924 in about 200 pages of which more than 44 full pages of illustrations being photographic rperoductions of temple gopuras, tanks, deities etc. He has given there a large volume of useful information, chiefly dealing with the legends, and with some epigraphic references. He has treated of the festivals beginning with the month of Thai and ending with Marhali. It is quite a useful book, useful because of the extensive legends given therein and the pictures. But it is not exhaustive and it is not generally concerned wtih the celebration. I have tried to describe the celebration in this book and have tried to make it extensive.

A number of these accounts had appeared in the pages of the *Swarajya* during the years 1975 and 1976. At the suggestion of some friends I am completing the series and am issuing them in book form in an enlarged version.

I am indebted to Dr. R. Nagaswami, Director of the State Archaeology Department for the illustrations in the book which I hope will stimulate the reader's interest and add to the usefulness of the book.

The printing of the book has been spread over an unusally large number of months owing to difficulties in the press and this has resulted in the lack of uniformity in the spelling of certain words like Aippasi, Poompavai, Tirup-puhal etc. Again, in carrying out the proof corrections the Press have made fresh mistakes, which do not come for the scrutiny of the proof reader. For these and other similar lapses, I crave the indulgence of the reader.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Festivals are fountains of joy for all. They exist in all countries, in all levels of society, in all races, and had been existing through all the ages. If man has been described as a social animal, festivals are the occasions for a close joyous coming together for the members of the social group, and they give full expression to the social instinct.

Festivals seem to be universal. They have been natural to man at all climes, in the past and in the present. Joy is inherent in the human being and only when there is an impediment in its fulfilment and experience, does sorrow arise. Sorrow is not inherent in man. The expression of joy is rejoicing and rejoicing means not one but many, means society. Sorrow becomes less and less oppressive when shared with others, while joy increases by sharing with others. This is the reason why sorrows like death, and rejoicing as at a wedding, are all social events the world over.

The expression of the greatest joy and the occasion therefor is called a festival. The best of any nation can be seen only in its feasts and festivals. These in turn imply a comradeship, fellow feeling and sharing; in short it is in a sense the expression of some of the best traits in man. The primtive man or the civilized man, each has loved festivals and rejoicing. Hunger has made man no doubt inventive but this inherent joy in group festivities and rejoicing have made man cultured and civilized.

The Tamil word for festival is *Vizha (vizhavu)*; this arises from the root, *vizhai*, to desire and to love; the noun means the thing desired, the object celebrated. So when the narrow love expands, it expresses itself in the form of festivals and celebrations. The Sanskrit word is *utsava* (festival, jubilee) which is derived from a root meaning to rise upwards; so this is going upward, getting elevated. In the English language also the two words feast (joyful religious anniversary) and festival (celebration) are very much the same. All these have the gene-

ral connotation of a celebration. Vizha is called also *Kondattam*, which word has the additional element of dance in it.

It is not possible to go into the question of what causes man to celebrate a thing and what gives him joy. The very getting together draws forth spontaneous joy. We may not probe into it further and try to see the reason behind a celebration. Whatever gives joy, man continues to do, and thus festivals have taken root - joyous occasions and occasions for festivity no doubt like child-birth, marriage and so on. Tamil literature would point out instances where even wars had been occasions for festivity.

Death is by its very nature the opposite of joy and so we may believe that it was only an occasion of mourning. But in fact, it is not so. Mourning is confined to a period of 15 days; then mourning stops and festivity commences. The reasons are not far to seek. It is that no one should be allowed to be steeped in mourning for long. One should get out of it and become normal, enjoying the pleasures of life. Hence in every case of death, there is a ceremony on a particular day (10, 15, or 16th) after which there is no mourning. The second reason is our faith in the indestructibility of the soul. The soul inhabiting this body has now given it up, to take up some other body. Why then need we grieve for long?

So the festivals go on. Men in the ancient agrarian society, always went out for work and so festivities became the chief concern of the women folk who stayed behind. Women in the past, till the liberation movement, had been of a self-sacrificing nature, always working and keeping the home warm and delightful both for their husbands and for their children. *Kural* would say that the duty of the house holder (*grhasta*, *illarattan*) was to take care of the five - the manes (dwelling in the southern regions), the deities, the guest, the kin and the family. This duty was rightly fulfilled by the women folk. That is also the secret of the continuity of the heritage of the festivals and their success.

Now every important occasion in the life of an individual from birth to death is a domestic festival or ritual. As a mat-

ter of fact, these rituals begin even before birth. During pregnancy, there is the *Valaiyal kappu*, known also as *poo-chututal*, (a kind of *raksha bandhanam*). Then in due time, the birth, *namakarana* or naming of the child, perhaps along with the first placing on the crib, ear-boring and the celebration of the first anniversary of the child's birth. The *annap-prasana* or the day of feeding of rice to the baby, then the *upakarma* among brahmins, placing the child in the school, and lastly the wedding. These are a total of sixteen and each is in some measure, large or small, a domestic festival.

The cycles of natural events are themselves great events. Sunrise and sunset call for special prayers, *Sandhyavandana;* so also the new moon and full moon days call for special *tarppana.* We shall see later the part played by the full moon days etc. in the matter of festivals. So also the equinoxes or *ayanas*, and eclipses. All these call for special baths in a river or the sea. Eclipses, though recognized as mere natural phenomena by astrologers and calendar makers in the past, have yet been the source of many romantic legends. Many occasions symbolize the rejoicings in the family, such as the *Pongal*, which really celebrate agricultural operations. *Adipperukku* is also similar, denoting the commencement of agriculture while the other, *pongal*, celebrates its culmination.

In between we have the days of great heroes and of forms of deities celebrated such at Ganesa, Sarasvati and Durga, Krishna, Muruha, Nataraja and Vishnu, and Siva and Rama. One thing however has to be clearly borne in mind. Although we have here the worship and festival for many forms of deities, it does not alter the basic concept of Hinduism, namely that there is only one God without a second.

This book thus deals only with the Hindu festivals, Saiva and Vaishnava, besides a large number of non-religious or social festivals. These may of course be general to the whole of India but particular to Tamil nadu. Unlike the others, Christian and Muslim, these had originated on the Indian soil and belong to India and to Tamilnad. The families which had converted themselves to the other religions, may yet be fcund to celebrate some of these festivals like the Tamil New Year Day, *Dipavali* and *Pongal*.

It may be remembered that the two religions Jainism and Buddhism had some currency in Tamilnad for a few centuries in the first millenium after Christ. Of the two religions, Jainism had been the state religion for some time at Madurai the Pandiya capital and at Kanchi the Pallava capital. Because of this position that religion had been able to contribute to a slight extent to the art and culture of the period. The contribution to art took the form of scupture, architecture and painting. But the Digambara Jainism in Tamilnad was a religion which negated life and so possibly, although it had temples and temple festivals on a small scale, it could not have contributed in any appreciable manner to the joy of public life and its rejoicings and festivals, the occasions of rejoicing. Music was virtually taboo in the Jainism of Tamilnad and women were kept under the thumb, since it was and ineluctable doctrine with the Jains. that women and music are to be put down because they were obstacles to one's spiritual progress. Therefore though Jainism was the state religion for sometime, it did not leave any mark or have any impact on the life of the Tamil people ingeneral There have been no festivals or rejoicings worth the name that had taken root in society because of the Jains. They might still be a force to reckon with in other part of India, but not in Tamilnad. Hence we do not have anything to say about Jain festivals in Tamilnad.

The same is the case with Buddhism. It was never a state religion here and its mark on Hindu society was much less, We do not therefore have anything to say about the Buddha festivals. However the Indian Union has taken up the birthday of the Vaisaka suddha Poornima, as a national festival and its echoes are certainly heard in Tamilnad.

Among the festivals elaborately dealt with here, under the various months, the Saiva and the Vaishnava festivals naturally predominate. Vinayaka, Skanda, Sakti and Siva festivals can be brought under Saivism, while Krishna and Rama and others like Vaikuntha-ekadasi, and Kaisika ekadasi will fall under Vaishnavism. Sarasvati, New Year Day and Pongal belong to both. But all this in reality does not detract from the concept of the One God in Hinduism. There is only one God

without a second. Whatever is said in the various names as Ganapati, Muruha, Durga, Vishnu, Krishna, Nataraja, Surya or Siva - all goes to the One Supreme, of which these are all well understood to be simply manifest forms.

There is a continuity in the festival celebrations and the festival culture of Tamilnadu which is hardly to be found elsewhere. Several factors have contributed to this continuity. The chief factor is the large number of temples which stud the country. Even small villages have large temples to Siva and Vishnu. All the temple festivals involve the entire society around, through daily aradhana, procession, music particularly the nagasvaram, singing of devotional songs, distribution of prasadams etc. The second factor is that foreign religions had not held any great sway over the Tamilnad. There was Jain rule in Madurai for some centuries which historians call the dark age in Pandinad. Again there was also Muslim rule there for a short period of about half a century. But Cholanad, which was the custodian of the culture of the land, was ruled continuously by Hindu rulers. After the Cholas, the Vijayanagar empire, then the Nayaka the Mahrattas, Till the last Mahratta ruler gave up his land to the British. Then was no foreign religious oppression and this was an important factor in the continuity of the festivals.

Besides, the songs of the Nayanmar and the Alvar in the temples was another integrating force of permanence. All these contributed to the retention of the great culture unbroken.

Modern scientific advance has added a new dimension to the celebration of festivals and that is the abolition of distance. Means of communication like the radio, television and the news paper take us to festival centres in no time or bring the festivals to our very doors. Distance is thus bridged and we are given the means of understanding others in different climes and places. Opperturnities for understanding and for spreading peace and goodwill have been brought to one's own doors and this is sure to result ulimately in the full realization of the bard of two thousand years ago who declared 'that the whole world is kin and any place is my place.'

CELEBRATION OF THE FESTIVALS

Joy of the Festivals

Festivals involve a lot of labour, sometimes extending over many days beforehand, as in the case of Dipavali and Sarasvati Puja, and a lot of expenditure in money and food resources. Most of the labour devolves on the women folk. Yet they do not seem to grudge it. They always engage themselves in these activities with great enthusiasm. Even people not so well placed do not appear to mind the additional expenditure involved. These festive actitivies bring out the creative talents in women and children, and so naturally these are sources and occasions for joy. The joy is all the greater for women, because the activity is mostly for the children's sake and naturally this affords satisfaction to the mothers in the work. Children enjoy the festive food no doubt, but they also enjoy the creative activities equally well. It is this enjoyment that is reflected in the women folk, and for them these occasions are thus a source of double enjoyment.

Festivals are always a great source of joy for the children of the house. They give them enough activity, and give them more to eat also. All festoons with mango leaves are made by them. Their competition with other children in this work gives them ample scope for their creative activity to express itself. Long hours they spend over this and they also learn by copying the hand work of children more clever than themselves. The expectation of good and sufficient things to eat whets their eagerness to do a good decoration. Besides decoration, they do other work such as casting the image of Ganesa for Ganesa Chaturthi, arranging books and dolls for Sarasvati puja, cleaning the house of cobwebs etc. for every festival, and so on. Naturally they get plenty of good things to eat - sweets on New Year's day, *chitrannam* on Adipperukku, varieties of *Koluk kattai*, jambu fruit, wood apple etc. on Vinayaka chaturthi day, a number of dishes every day on the ten days of Dasarah, a large number of sweets at Dipavali time, sugarcane and

plantain fruits for Pongal and so on. The gaudy dresses and visits to the neighbours' houses on the occasions of the Dasarah and Dipavali add an extra zest to the little girls.

Decoration - Festoons

The stringing of festoons in the house on festive occasions is part of the decoration programme. The entrance to the house is hung with festoons and they are hung around the place of the puja. The modern fashion is to purchase coloured tissue paper, cut it into pretty figures and string them. But upto the end of the first quarter of this century, paper festoons had no part in the festivities. People did very artistic decorations. but without cost. The tender coconut leaf shoots and palmyrah leaf shoots were used to prepare festoons. There was no need for the investment of any money on these. They were all had in any villager's garden. The people cut one or two leaves, took out each bit seperately, cut it to the required length with a sharp knife and plaited them into the required forms in a very artistic manner. The tender shoots were all white in colour and alternating with the dark green mango leaves, they presented a pleasing colour contrast to the eye. The coconut festoons dried and withered in about two days, but the palmyrah shoots never withered. They remained fresh for any length of time. So after one occasion they were taken out carefully and stored, to be used for the next occasion.

Besides, many water lilies were available from local pools and ponds for the decoration. The lilies were generally available in white, pink and scarlet, and occasionally blue nilotpala; taken with the long stem, they were also hung round as festoons and as wreaths. Thus all decoration was made without spending any *pisa*. Besides, the plaiting gave scope to the expression of the artistic talents of the people, particularly the children. They vie with one another in working elaborate designs like the parrot and other fowl, the chariot, the rattle etc. on the coconut and palm leaf festoons.

Kolam

Kolam is an artistic symmetric design worked on the floor, done with fine white rice flour by dribbling it between the thumb and the forefinger, or by squeezing evenly through a piece of cloth soaked in a solution of rice ground with water. The designs are intricate and elaborately done by the dexterous fingers of the women folk. There are countless numbers of such designs done by the older women. Dots are placed evenly and symmetrically to weave round the outline of the design, and lines are drawn round them to achieve the desired result. Not only floral designs but others such as a temple car, a flower pot etc. are also woven. Those who are not nimble with their fingers use a small perforated tin cylinder and by rolling the cylinder the desired pattern is laid on the floor by the flour in the cylinder dribbling out through the perforation. In the earthern floors of the past, the wet flour design stayed for a number of days, but with the cement and the mosaic floors, it comes off immediately and the decoration does not have any great impact.

White rice flour was the only article used for *kolam* on all auspicious days in Tamilnad in the past. But now many colours are employed, by wider contact with North India, where *rangoli* or colour decoration patterns on the floor have been popular from long past Coloured rice flour and other material are used to add to the effect of the flour *kolam* of the olden days.

Red earth, charcoal powder, dried green leaf powder, yellow turmeric powder etc. are some of the natural colouring materials used.

We shall not say here any thing about the urban practice of drawing *kolams* in what is called *makku - mavu*, which is just the mortar taken from buildings pulled down and powdered. This contains a large quantity of lime and when drawn on a cement fioor constantly it leaves a white discolouration. This is quite against the principle of the rice flour *kolam*, which besides having the first purpose of decoration and beatification, has a secondary purpose of feeding other creation like the ants, the squirrel and the crow. This expresses a concern for other life, while lime *kolams* (*makku mavu*) cannot.

Flour kolams are drawn not only on the floor but on all seat planks etc , where any deity is to be invoked. They are drawn also on the ceremonial plank seats where the bride and bride groom are to be seated. There is no festival, ritual or ceremony without kolam.

Lamps

In every festival we have a lamp or many lamps. The lighted lamp is a symbol of God who is all Light. All the hymns of the Nayanmar and the Alvar hail God as the great Light. Before the advent of electricity, the oil lamp was universal. Even now, although the petromax lamps and the electric lamps are used for illumination purposes, in the sanctum and in the heart of the place of worship in all Hindu worship and rituals, only the oil lamp is to be used. The *kuttu vilakku*, the tall standing lamp, or lamp combined with its stand, is a symbol of Tamilnad art dedicated to God. Whatever may be the festival, any domestic worship or ritual, everything commences with the lighting of the lamp. Often, the deity to be worshipped or invoked on the lamp itself. Otherwise it is placed in pairs, one at either side of the pedestal where the divinity is invoked. The lamp is the *Dipam* and at the commencement, the dipam is worshipped as Dipa Lakshmi.

Needless to say, the temple springs into life with the lighting of the first lamp in the sanctum. There are lamps standing on the ground and lamps hanging by a brass chain from the ceiling, called *sara vilakku.* Electric lamps are not premitted into the sanctum. The lamp burns in oil or ghee, with a cotton wick. The lamp is considered to have life; the flame flickers and waves in the wind. This movement endows it with the quality of life, so very much recognizable by the devotees outside the sanctum. This becomes at once extremely artistic, which the electric lamp can never become; it has no doubt much greater brightness, but no life.

The lamp is conceived of as God, as is evidenced by the rituals during any puja. The *kumkum* and sandal are applied to it and flowers; also is offered a *neivedya.* At the end of all the rituals, a neivedya offering is again made and then the lamp is

put out. The rule is that one should not blow on it with his mouth but should snuff out the flame with a flower or a leaf petal, and then move it from its place near the centre in token of the departure of Dipa Lakshmi.

The lighted lamp is the first item not only in all auspicious rituals but also in all inauspicious rituals. Not only for wedding, but also for funeral ceremonies, the lamp is the first thing to be installed.

Many of our festivals are festivals of light. Every one will remember the Dipavali, the row of lights with its crackers, and the Karttikai when hundreds of lamps are lit in every home and placed in every nook and corner including the cattle pen and other unused sheds. Light is also a symbol of joy and the joy is reflected on all these occasions. Parents even today take it as a matter of great privilege and joy to supply their daughters with ghee and wicks for lighting lamps on the *Pongal* day in their homes. Daughters living in very distant places get these by post well in advance. The Karttikai dipam not only in Tiru Annamalai but in every small temple and in every small home is an occasion for lighting the heart. God is the supreme light that leads us from the unreal to the Real, from the evanescent to the Eternal, and from darkness to Light. No wonder the little lamp, which dispels, in however small a measure the darkness around, is considered as a symbol of God, the eternal Light.

The lighting of a lamp in the soul was the occasion for the Mudalalvar - Poyhaiyar, Bhutattar and Peyar - to have a vision of Lord Vishnu in a dark corridor at Tiruk-Kovalur. A similar lamp is lit by Nakkirar on a later day to have a vision of Siva at Kailas. In modern times, Ramalingar tried to introduce the worship of the *Joti* the lighted lamp as the universal symbol of the Eternal Light.

In ordinary parlance, Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, will enter only a bright home, and so there is the custom of placing a lighted lamp in the evening at the entrance to a house in token of welcome to Lakshmi. The new bride entering the place of wedding, in agricultural families, carried

with her a lighted lamp placed on a measureful of paddy, *nirai-nazhi*, in token of joy and plenty. During *aratis* waved before newly weds to ward off the evil eye, a lighted camphor is placed on the saffron coloured water before waving.

The lamp in some form seems to be a symbol of God or be used as an invocation to God. The Christians use a candle which is nothing but a lamp of solidified oil, On their All Soul's day, they light candles in churches and in graveyards to all souls and saints. The Japanese, the Parsis and even the Muslims have their own day of the festival of Lights.

Flowers

India, particularly Tamil nad, is a country which not only enjoys but adores and worships flowers. Every small village here has a temple for Siva and the temple has a *sthala vriksha* or sacred temple tree. Any plant can be a temple tree. In the remote past, man came to see here a piece of stone in the shade of a plant and when he learnt to worship the stone as a symbol for God the tree which shaded the stone from the sun and rain and wind acquired sanctity and came to be worshipped. The number of such plants might well be several hundreds and the shrines where they are worshipped are seveal thousands. Huge trees like the banyan and the pipal are temple trees in several places, while the beautiful fragrant flowers like jasmine and chrysanthemum are also temple 'trees'. Even the flimsy grass, the thorny carissa and the cactus, and the poisonous calotropsis are temple trees in some places.

All rituals for man here begin and end with flowers. There is no ritual without flowers. The common fllowers are of course the jasmine varieties. Flower for any ritual domestion or temple means only the jasmine. Wearing of flower in the hair is part of the Indian culture, and fragrant flowers like the jasmine, the chrysanthemum, champaka, sampangi, nila sampangi are the common flowers, to which list the rose has been added on the advent of the Muslims into India. Non-fragrant flowers were not generally worn by women but they are welcome to the deities. The very fragrant shoots of *maruvam*

and *davanam* (*artemisia*) are favourites with women. They are interwoven for their green colour along with bright red, yellow and white flowers when making wreaths for the deities.

A reference to some of the flowers and their dedication to the gods will be interesting. The blades of *aruhu* (common hariali grass) are a favourite with Siva and Ganesa. The poisonous *calatropsis* is in great demand at the time of Ganesa chaturthi for his worship. The *vilva* leaves (*aegle marmelos*) and the tulasi leaves (*ocimum*, basil) are special favourites of Siva and Vishnu respectively. The ordinary chrysanthemum (*sevvandi*) is the favourite of Siva at Tiruchirappalli and there is a *puranam* called *Sevvandip puranam*.

Tiru-atti (*bauhinia*), *konrai* (*cassia*) and *tumbai* (*leucas*) are again special to Siva, while the *kadambu* (the common *cademba*) and *vetchi* (*ixora coccinea*) are favourites of Muruha. Generally Siva is worshipped with white flowers.

Red flowers are favourites of Sakti, and particularly *sembaratti*, called *jabakusam* in Bengal is considered to be a special favourite of Sakti. The lotus is an important fllower for worship of all the deities. The white lotus is considered as the abode of Sarasvati, the goddess of Learning, while the red lotus is considered the abode of Lakshmi, the goddess of Prosperity or wealth. *Talai* (*pandanus*) though fragrant, is taboo for Siva on account of a legend of Thiru Annamalai where *talai* gave false evidence to support Brahma. The *margosa* blooms and leaves perform various functions in the worship of Mariyamman and other similar deities of a lower order.

Most of the fllowers mentioned are available both in the cultivated and in the wild state.

As insignificant flower named *kanakambaram* (barleria) is the raging fashion of urban areas. because it does not fade for many days. Where people do not bathe for days together, they are content with a flower which does not fade for days together. This is an orange colour and has many hybrid varieties.

Fruits

Along with flowers we have to mention fruits. The two occur prominently in all our rituals and festivals. Among the fruits the banana is the omnipresent fruit, considered in the Tamil Nadu, the poor man's fruit. The Pongal season is the banana season and Pongal invariably conjures up before our minds thousands upon thousands of bunches of the banana and heaps upon heaps of the sugarcane. There could be no ritual of any kind in the home or in the temple without the ever present banana. Every domestic celebration begins with the banana fruit. *Palum Palamum*, milk and the banana fruit, are the items first fed ceremoniously to the newly wedded bride and bridegroom who enter the father-in-law's house for the first time. There are many varieties of the banana in Tamilnad, each area having its own favourite special variety. But one variety commonly known as *poovan* is the universal favourite; this is because it is available in all the areas and in all the seasons and at a relatively cheaper price. It is such a great favourite that banana in Tamilnad for any auspicious occasion means only the *poovan* variety.

The lime fruit is a symbol of auspiciousness and anyone visiting a ruler, a child or women, a guru or an official, if he cannot take any other present, is enjoined to take at least one lime fruit. The wood apple and the jambu are favourites with Ganesa There is of course the mango festival. The jack is the sthala vriksha in Tirukutralam (Courtalam); Saint Tirugnana Sambandhar has sung a separate song on it as well as on the white jambu (Vennaval) which is the sthala vriksha at Tiru Araikka.

Of equal importance is the coconunt offering. Along with the fruit, the coconunt also is considered an essential food offering. Be it the temple or the home, the coconunt is invariably present, with betels when the floral archana is over. When the food offering takes place, along with food (or in its place the banana fruit) the coconunt is offered; it is broken in the middle, the water inside is poured out, and the two broken parts offered.

Food Arrangements for Festivals

There is an interesting association of food arrangements connected with many festivals. They have all been noted upon under their respective heads. Generally on all festive days there is a sumptuous feast consisting of many vegetable dishes, *vadai* and *payasam* and banana fruits. Even in the case of *vratas* involving fasting, there is also a feast or festive food after the *vrata* is over. A further general note may be given here.

The year begins with the New Year Day, on which the use of the *margosa* blooms either in *rasam* or in *pachadi* has been considered important. The mango is of course the object of celebration in the mango festival which is confined to the Karaikkal region.

Next we may think of the *Adip-perukku* festival when we have the *kapparisi*, rice soaked in water and mixed with jaggery and coconut chips distributed at the water front. For lunch on this day there is always a *chitrannam*, half a dozen varieties of specially prepared rice dishes, such as *sarkkaraippongal, ven-pongal, puliyardoia ellorai, tenkaisadam, elumicham sadam* and *dadyodanam*, besides the modern vegetable pulav. Adip-puram has sprouted pulses.

The *kolukkattai* and *modakam* on the occasion of Vinayaka chaturthi are something very special, along with a *sundal*, which are not repeated on any other day. The *jambu* fruits and *vila* fruits (wood apple) which are in season at this time of the year are also special offerings on this day. *Puttu* is the important dish for Avani Mulam and hard confectionaries like *seedai* and *tengulal* for Krishna Jayanti. The dasarah festival admits of all varieties of confectionaries.

Dipavali has its own attraction in food, being an occasion when as many sweets and salted dishes as the resources and time of the family permit, are prepared. The estables of this occasion are a source of delight for the children for at least a week after the *dipavali*. *Karttikaip-pori*, puffed rice mixed with treacle is the important item in the next month on the day of the annual Karttikai festival.

The two festivals, Vaikuntha Ekadasi for the Vaishnavas and the Ardra Darsanam for the Saivas are the important festivals in Marhali and each has a speciality in food. Cooking the *sesbania* leaves as a dish is important for the meal on the *Dvadasi* day which breaks the fast of the *Ekadasi*. Similarly *Tiruvadiraik-kali*, broken rice cooked with pulses and jaggery and coconut peels is important for the Ardra.

The *Pongal* food prepared with newly harvested rice on the occasion of *Makara sankranti* along with the rich fare of sugarcane and banana fruits is the most important among all the festivals, equalled probably only by the *dipavali* sweets. Lastly there is the *karadai* for the Savitri *nonbu*.

So this is a brief survey of the food traditions and the food preparations for the festivals of the year.

The Ritual of the Puja

Most festivals are attended with a kind of *puja* in the home. The puja prescribes a course of discipline, which may be elaborate in some cases, but basically the following are the chief features of the ritual. The members of the house have an early morning bath on the day (bath for most purposes means also bathing the head, not bathing upto the neck only as seems to be the practice in urban localities today), a general cleaning up of the house, particularly the front and the puja area or yard, then a decoration with festoons and *kolam*. Festoons do not mean paper festoons; the rural economy being always a self-contained one, it does not admit expense on celebrations for available items. Festoons are prepared with mango leaves and artistically plaited tender white coconut leaves, which cost no money, while paper festoons involve expense.

Ingredients for puja are the same for all the festivals-lamps with oil or ghee, flowers, fruits (chiefly plaintain), camphor and sandal, with betels; a bell and a plain seat (*asana*). Sugarcane when in season is added as in the case of *Pongal*. There is generally a cooked food offering which varies with the occasion. The object of worship is generally invoked on a

pinch of sandal or turmeric etc. In some cases a pot of water with mango leaves at the mouth with a coconut on top and with a cotton yarn woven round the pot is also placed for worship. This is called a *purna kumbha* (a filled pot). The ceremonial lamp in Hindu households is the oil (or ghee) lamps not the kerosene, gas or electric lamp, nor candle. The lamp is lit and the puja commences.

There is first an *achamana*, ceremonial sipping of water, then *pranayama* control of the breath; then *sankalpa*, or a resolution that I am going to perform this puja. A flower is placed first on the *dipa* (lamp) conceived as *Dipa lakshmi*; then another flower is placed on the pedestal, *asana*; on the bell; then in all cases a Vignesvara puja (puja to Ganesa), invoked on a pinch of ground turmeric, with flowers and *akshata* and *aruhu*, *Archana* (flowers) *aruhu* (grass), *patra* (leaf) or *askshata* (rice mixed with sandal or turmeric) is placed on the head and feet of the invoked deity; waving of *dhupa* (incense) and *dipa*. Then *neivedya* showing the food offerings including fruits, coconut and betels with a spoonful of water; and *argya* in token of His having accepted it. *Dipa* and *karpura* (camphor) *aradana*; then a suitable *prarthana* or prayer and *pradakshina* or circumambulation. People prostrate before the invoked deity and the sacred ash or tulasi tirttam is taken as *prasadam*. Ganesa, or whoever it is, is now just moved a little tothe right in token of the completion of the *puja* and the departing of the Being from this limited state to his or her all pervasive state. Then the people of the house have their food. Until the puja is completed the people are usually without food for the day.

The Kalasa or Purna Kumbha

The deity worshipped is invoked in most cases on a pinch of sand or sandal, turmeric or even cow dung at the time of worship. Rarely as in the case of the *Vinayaka chaturthi* is the deity invoked on a clay *image* of the real form, made for the occasion. In some cases like Varalakshmi, the deity is invoked on a *kalasa* (*kumbha*) or pot of water. The *kalasa* or even *ghata* figures prominently in all pujas like *Kumbhabhisekha* for a temple puja, for *shashti abda purtti* and so on. Water is one of

the five elements and is also one of the eight forms of Siva (*ashta murtta*) and invocation of God on a pot of water seems to be a favourite mode of worship. For all *yagasala puja* we have the *ghata* (pot).

The *ghata* is conceived of as the body of God. It is wound round on the outside with white cotton yarn which is said to symbolize the nerves of the body. It is filled with water, preferably river water, all rivers (running streams) being conceived of as the sacred Ganga. Small quantities of fragrant spices are dropped into the water. Coins, gold and gems (where people can afford these) are also dropped in to the pot. The pot is filled nearly to the brim with water and purified by the incantation of powerful mantras. A bunch of mango leaves is placed on its mouth, on which a coconnt with husk removed, retaining its tuft alone is placed, with its tuft pointing up. It is decked with turmeric, sandal, *kumkum* and *darbha* grass tied into a knot (*kurcham*), and flowers. Usually, paddy or rice is spread on a plaintain leaf and the pot is placed on its midst. Some *akshata* (rice mixed with sandal, and flowers) is spilled on the head of the coconut at the top of the pot.

All the usual pujas are done, offerings are made to the *kalasa* and after the puja, the water in the pot is sprinkled with the mango leaves over the worshippers and their families or on the places sought to be purified (as in the case of a *graha pravesa* or a *punyahavachana* ceremony). The mantras offered to the *kalasa* by the duly qualified priest are considered to effect the purification.

When this *kalasa* is taken and presented as a token of welcome to a distinguished visitor or *acharya*, it is called a *purna-kumbha* reception.

In Saivism, Siva can be worshipped only on three forms-the *Sivalinga*, the various *Murtis* such as Nataraja, Chandrasekhara, Somaskanda etc., and the *kalasa*; these three also known as the *sthamba, bimba* and the *kumbha*. No picture or yantra is generally permitted.

The *kumbha* is known by various names, as *purana kalasa, purana ghata, mangala kalasa, ghata* etc. This is an artistic symbolism which goes back to the Rig veda. The *purana kalasa* is symbolic of the human body which overflows by the Grace of God with all kinds of bounty. It is also symbolic of the pot of nectar (*amirta ghata*) which contained the nectar, obtained according to the ancient legends, by the churning of the ocean of milk. It is significant that Siva enshined at Tirukkadavur in the Kaveri delta is known as Amirta ghastesvara and at Kumbhakonam, He is known as Kumbhesvara.

Light and Sound:

Although all the Indian festivities, whatever they be, have a common spiritual core, yet the average man takes to them with a riotous enthusiasm. Higher levels of society take to it with song and music, flowers, sandal and sweets. But to the ordinary people a festival is full of sound and noise, a boisterous merry-making. Children drawing a tiny chariot to the river front for Adipperukku, the procession of the clay image of Ganesa for immersion in the river after the Ganesa Chaturthi festival is over, the Navaratri celebrations of gorgeonus colour and varieties of eatables, the drums on the Pongal occasion in the Madras area are all attendad with great noise. The occasion of the *Mattuppongal* and its attendant worship of the cow and its *madu-mirattal* call for the greatest amount of hilarity. Women folk have a great part in the festivities for Adi perukku; Navaratri is theirs exclusively; and they are now appropriating a greater share in the Dipavali celebrations. The crackers and fireworks on the occasion of the Dipavali provide both light and sound to people at all levels - young and old, rich and poor, educated and illiterate. The ingenuity of the cracker manufacturers at Sivakasi is bringing into the market newer and newer varieties, which are both a source of delight to the children and of drain on their parents' purses. But on the other hand, the Karttikai day throws the children on their own resources and brings into play their powers of creativity in making the *Kartikaip-pori*, causing the whole early night appear like a world of bright stars floating on the air.

The Karttikaip-pori by its very nature yet continues to be a great village celebration and it is hardly likely its ingenuity and charm can ever migrate into the city. Fire works, even apart from Dipavali seem to have come to stay. They provide both light and sound and enliven the midnight hours by their display of the rainbow colours. They play a large part today in all temple festivities and the temple procession at night and seem to steal all the show. Large amounts are spent thereon in every temple. There are some experts in every locality who specialize in fire works, and they are given the responsibillity of putting up a bright and noisy show. This temple show has also invaded private homes, when marriage processions also indulge in variegated and costly, though attractive, firework displays Political parties also are vying with one another in fire works display. Not only children bnt even grown ups indulge in this and a pear to take immense delight therefrom. This trend is to be deplored. Our opinion is that all this has been overdone and needs to be put an end to or at least curbed. There is no great harm in mild fireworks display in temple processions but otherwise this has to be stopped altogether.

Festivals in the Temple and in the Home

There is no clear marking line with us to indicate temple festivals and domestic festivals. Since every festival has a spiritual core, such a distinction cannot easily be made and is not necessary. Dipavali, Pongal, Adipperukku and some others may appear to be domestic festivals but here also there is some temple involvement. For example, on the Dipavali day, all the deities in the temple are clad in new *vastras* and and this requires the attendance of the entire village for temple worship. On the *Mattu-pongal* day, people go to the temple after the *Madu-mirattal* is over and the cows are carefully, tethered in the pen, for a *darsan* and a *prasadam* of *veppilaik-katti*, a mixture of lemon leaves and chillies powdered together.

Although temple festivals appear to be only religious, they are not mere temple celebrations but do involve some social values. For example, the Ardra darsan is specifically a

temple festival, although one worships Nataraja in the home also. But yet it is also a social celebration in this sense that in every household the *Tiruvadiraikkali* forms the unique and indispensable factor.

So also with regard to Vaikuntha ekadasi. People may wait in long queues for the opening of the *svarga vasal*, the Gates of Heaven, but it does not stop there. It is taken into the home in the observance of the *Paranai* (*paranam*) i.e., the break of the fast on the previous *ekadasi* day, now at the dvadasi time and in the requirement of partaking of the *ahatti* (*sesbania*) leaves in a side dish, as part of the ritual.

Similarly there is the *pori* or puffed and sweetened rice on the Karttikai day; there is of course the grand celebration in the temple. Chidren have a gala celebration for the better part of the night with their lighted Karttikai pori revolving round their heads, making the whole village a heaven of luminous stars on earth.

All these go to highlight the element of joy manife ted in the eating part prescribed or observed by long custom as part of the temple ceremony.

Festivals like Vinayaka Chaturthi and Sarasvati puja are of course both temple celebrations and home celebrations. The above instances are given to illustrate how a temple festival is inducted in to the home.

DISTRIBUTION OF FESTIVALS

Absence of Festivals in Vaikasi and Ani

It is interesting to note that, generally speaching, all the major festivals of the Tamilnadu are spread out through the twelve months of the year. Beginning with the month of Chitrai the first month, to *Panguni* the twelfth month, we find some major festival in every month. The *Poompavaip-padikam* of Sambandhar also mentions them in order.

However, when we examine the full and long list of monthly festivals observed in Tamilnadu, we may note that there are no great festivals in the two months *Vaikasi* and *Ani*. (There are of course minor festivals in both the months, like *Vaikasi Visakam* which is special to Muruha, *Ani Uttiram* which is special to Nataraja known as *Ani Tirumanjanam*, and the Mango festival of Karaikkal on the Pournami day of Ani which is special only to the area round Karaikkal. All these stop with being mere temple celebrations.) Even in the first month of Chitrai, there is only the New Year's Day festival on the first day of the month and year, as a great national festival.

There is a social explanation for this fact. The Tamil country is a tropical country where the summer is severe during the three months of Chitrai, Vaikasi and Ani. In the delta areas, all rivers are dry and even the vIllage tanks will be fast drying up, because of the sun's heat. There is generally no rainfall. Festivals which are a cultural heritage of the people are most enjoyable only when there are large sheets of water around in tanks and in running streams. So, since there is not that much of water in these months, festivals also have been few at this period, from the ancient past.

There is another and a more important reason. The festivals in general are celebrated every where, not only in Tamilnadu but the world over, only by the rural folk. They constituted in the past, and even today they constitute, the major part of the population. These people are mostly engaged in agriculture and only during these few months are they free from farm work. The rural community is now free to attend

to other work. Weddings in rural communities are a great social event, and the people had set apart these months for marriage celebrations. It is also noteworthy that weddings are generally not celebrated in the agricultural communities in the months *Adi* to *Panguni* (August to March), as these months are a continuous season of agricultural operations. The few that do take place in *Avani* and *Thai* are exceptions.

Marriages in rural communities are always large social gatherings where people, relatives and friends, move out from distant places and congregate in the place of the wedding not for a single day, but for a few days, 'four days' as marriage invitations in the past used to specify. The wedding actually relates only to one house in the community, but all the families in the village suspend their other activities and engage themselves in the work connected with the wedding, for the four days. Hence they cannot afford to have any distraction in the form of any other public festivity during the period.

Here people not only meet to participate in the wedding festivities and bless the bride and bridegroom, but also meet to discuss many affairs relating to the whole year and then depart. Talks and negotiations for fresh alliances are also carried on now, to culminate in the wedding ceremonies at the next wedding season. All this requires considerable leisure, and the getting together of the people of the same class for some length of time.

Marriage functions are the occasions for these talks and necessary plans, and only these two months in the year afford the leisure. Hence the entire community stops all kinds of other festivals, which were in a sense socio-religious gatherings and not pure social gatherings. Thus this period of about two months was reserved in the distant past solely for this purpose. These may easily be seen to be the reasons for the absence of major festivals in the two month Vaikasi and Ani.

Festivals round the Calendar

There are a little more than a dozen important festivals which take us round the calendar and we shall just tabulate them here. They will be discussed later in the usual course in detail along with the others which are of a minor importance. We shall

enumerate them on the basis of the Tamil calendar. These have been celebrated for ages past, for centuries before Indian independence was won, and long before the spirit of nationhood in the modern sense took shape.

CHITRAI	1.	*The First* of the month - Tamil New Year's Day.
	2.	The *Chitra Pournami.*
VAIKASI		*Visakam*, special to Muruha.
ANI		The *mango* festival in honour of Saint Karaikkal Ammai. The *Tirumanjanam* of Nataraja at Chidambaram and the *abhisheka* to the Nataraja temples in every place. These have only a secondary importance.
ADI	3.	Adi 18th, *Padinettam Perukku.*
AVANI	4.	*Vinayaka Chaturthi.*
		The Avani avittam or Upakarma and Gayatri japam for the brahmin community.
PURATTASI	5.	*Sarasvati puja* and *Ayudha puja* with the attendant *Vijaya Dasami* for the entire Tamil Nadu.
		Krishna Jayanti celebrated in urban area and mostly only by the brahmin community.
AIPPASI	6.	*Dipavali.*
	7.	*Skanda Sashti.*
KARTTIKAI	8.	*Karttikai Dipam.*
MARHALI	9.	*Arudra Darsanam.*
	10.	*Vaikuntha Ekadasi.*
		The last day of the month as ***Bhogi pandihai.***
THAI	11.	1st as *Pongal* day; 2nd *Mattup-pongal* day; 3rd *Karinal* day.
MASI	12.	*Masi Magham.*
	13.	*Maha Sivaratri.*
PANGUNI	14.	*Panguni Uttiram.*
		Sri Rama navami.

Here we have a list of fourteen festivals which may be called the National Festivals of Tamilnadu, although some of them are also National Festivals of an All-India character, such as Vinayaka chaturthi, Sarasvati puja, Dipavali and Maha Sivaratri. The above list includes a few festivals of lesser importance, but they have not been numbered.

When we examine the days of the festivals, we find there are some festivals which do not depend on any *thithi* (phase of the moon) or *nakshatra* (star) but are celebrated on fixed days of the monthly calendar. The following are some of them.

New Year's Day	—	the first day of *Chitrai*, corresponding to the 14th of April.
Adip-perukku	—	The 18th of *Adi*, corresponding to about the 2nd of August.
Aippasi Kadai-mulukku	—	The last day of the month; corresponding to about the 15th of November and its sequel Mudamulukku on the next day the first day of Karttikai.
Pongal festival	—	Four days :
Bhogi	—	the last day of *Marhali*, January 13th.
Pongal	—	the first day of *Thai*, January 14th.
Mattuppongal	—	January 15th and
Karinal	—	January 16th.
Karadai Nonbu	—	The last day of the month of Masi - the conjunction of Masi and Panguni, about the 15th March,

Similarly among the new national festivals which are evolved out of the politiical awakening of the peoples of India, the following are the most important and they occur on the specified dates without any kind of change.

The Independence Day	—	15th of August.
The Republic Day	—	26th of January.
The Gandhi Jayanti Day	—	2nd of October.

Festivals and Pilgrimages

Some of the most important temple festivals are regulated in a manner which will help the pilgrims to make their tours

conveniently and at leisure. In the past there was no good road, and transport was either by walk or by bullock cart along muddy roads. Devotees had been by religion and custom enjoined to visit the important festivals at the major temples at least once in their life time. It appears as though all the festivals had been regulated in the past with a view to helping the itinerant devotees.

Devotees had been required to visit temples and worship the particular *sthala* or shrine, the form of Siva installed there, and also the *tirtta*, a sacred tank or river of the place. St. Tayumanavar of a later day would declare that when the spiritual aspirint goes on a tour of places, shrines and the sacred waters, a competent *guru* will appear before him in a proper place for imparting spiritual knowledge to guide him forward in his godward march.

> மூர்த்திதலம் தீர்த்தம் முறையாய்த் தொடங்கினர்க்கோர்
> வார்த்தை சொலச் சற்குருவும் வாய்க்கும் பராபரமே.

There are not many major festivals in the first six (Tamil) months Chitrai to Purattasi. In the *distant past*, Avani and Purattasi were rainy months and so travel and pilgrimage were avoided. The itinerary began virtually in Aippasi. People were free to witness the *annabhisheka* in the temple nearest to them. Two other festivals important to them in the month, are the *Shasti* festival at Sikkil, near Nagapattinam south east corner of the Tanjavur district, and the other the *Kadaimuzhukku* at Mayuram in the opposite north eastern corner of the district at quite a long distance.

The next month is Karttikai, and the most important festival is the annual Karttikai at distant Tiru Annamalai. Probably all persons might not have been able to afford the time and energy required for the purpose. Hence shrines nearer had been given equal importance such as Swamimalai, Vaidhisvarankoil, Palani etc. Besides, every Sunday in the month of Karttikai is a festival at the shrines close to the Kaveri and we have such grand Sunday celebrations at Kuttalam, Tiru Nageswaram, Tiru Vanchiyam etc.

Marhali has two of the greatest festivals in all Tamil Nadu-*Ardra darsanam* at Chidambaram for the Saivas and *Vaikuntha*

3

Ekadasi at Sri Rangam for the Vaishnavas. The *Gaja samhara* festival at Valuvur near Mayuram (slaying of the elephant by Siva) is an equally popular festival on the early morning of the *Ardra darsana* day. Thai has the ancient *Pusam* festival at Tiruvidaimarudur. Masi has the *Magham* festival, celebrated on all water front shrines, with the famous *Maha magham* in Kumbakonam occurring once in twelve years. The last is a great event for which most people would have been planning years ahead.

The last month of the calendar is Panguni which witnesses the annual temple festival of eleven days in every village and town called the *Brahmotsava*. The modern day attaches special importance to the *Arupattu muvar* festival at Mylapore in the city of Madras, the festival for the Sixty three Saiva Saints. The New year now begins with the month of Chitrai introducing the important festival called *Tirumulaippal* at Sirkali, the festival of the feeding of milk by Sakti to the child Jnanasambandhar. A festival of some importance is the *Kala samhara* at Tirukkadavur, the kicking away of Yama the god of Death, for the sake of the boy worshipper Markkandeyar.

This is the itinerary or tour programme of pilgrims who make it a point to worship at important shrines during the most important festivals there. It can be seen that the festivals and the places had been so distributed in space and time that pious persons have the requisite time to travel from one place to another after worshipping in each of the places. There were free feeding centres in all these places. Agrarian communities considered it an honour to feed pilgrims during festivals. Rice was in plenty and money was of no account. So people had no second thoughts about undertaking a pilgrimage.

The months Vaikasi to Purattasi did not have any such major temple festivals to attract large crowds. There are some like the *mango festival* in honour of Karaikkal Ammaiyar at Karaikkal and the *Adi-tapas* of Gomati ambikai at Sankarankoil but they do not have the great national importance of the foregoing. Festivals at Madurai, Sri Rangam and Tiruppati are many; and in these places we have several festivals every month and so no particular festival and month need be specified for a pilgrimage to these places. Tamil people yet think

of Tiruppati as their own place of pilgrimage and so it has been mentioned here. The place had been a Tamil city even as late as the Second World War and it is an accident of politics that it has gone over to the Andhra Pradesh.

Festivals round Pournami

The full moon day *(Pournima)* is a day of great joy and merry making in Tamilnad. This country lies north of the Equator and south of the Tropic of Cancer and so most of the year it is hot during the day. Hence the cool moon in the evening is always welcome and the full moon more so. The full moon days are always days of festive gathering.

We shall now examine the full moon days of the successive months. The first is *Chitra Pournami*, in the first month, celebrated today all over Tamilnad as a day dedicated to Chitra gupta the accountant of Yama Dharmaraja, the god of Death. This festival is generally restricted to the house itself and it is not any elaborate social occasion.

The pournami in *Vaikasi*, the second month, generally occurs in conjunction with the star *Visaka*. The *Vaikasi Visaka* is a special festive day for Lord Muruha in all the south Indian temples; Visaka is the star of the *avatar* of Muruha. The *Vaisaka suddha purnima* is also celebrated as the day of attainment of Nirvana by the Buddha. This is according to the lunar reckoning, and often it occurs in the Tamil month of Chitrai.

The pournami day in the third month of *Ani* is the day of the mango festival at Karaikkal. It is a rare and unique festival, although local, in this that it is a festival for a Saiva saint and a woman saint, Karaikkal ammai, and it is also a *festival for a fruit*.

The pournami day in *Adi* is the *Guru purnima*, where Vyasa puja is performed in honour of Vyasa, the legendary compiler of the Vedas, the writer of the Mahabharata which contains the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the traditional narrator of the Eighteen Mahapuranas.

The *Avani* full moon day generally coincides with the *avitta nakshatra*, which is the day of *upakarma* for the twice-born, with its attendant *Gayatri japa* on the following day.

The *pournami* in the month of *Purattasi* is a day dedicated to the celebration of the plant world, called *Niraipani vizha* when fruits and vegetables are hung around in display in the temples. (Pani is service, and niraipani is the culmination of the servicer) This is a kind of thanks-giving to God who was merciful enough to give a plentiful harvest to the people. Similar display of agricultural produce is also being done in churches in the western countries.

Ōna vila was celebrated on the *Aippasi* full moon day in the past as referred to by St Jnanasambandhar, but it is not in vogue now. However this day is important as the day of *annabhisheka* for Nataraja in Chidambaram, that is, the image of Natataja is bathed in cooked rice symbolically and the large quantities of rice prepared and offered to Nataraja are distributed to the people. The same *abhisheka* and distribution are made in many other large temples like Tiruvidaimarudur, Tiruppanandal, Tirukkadavur etc.

The *Karttikai* full moon day occurs in conjunction with the Karttikai star, where the famous Dipam festival is conducted in Tiru Annamalai and all the other Saiva temples. This Karttikai is also the day of lights, when hundreds of lamps are lit in every household in memory of the Tiru Annamalai legend.

In the next month of *Marhali* the *ardra* constellation occurs in conjunction with pournami, and on the morning of this day is celebrated the Dance festival of Lord Nataraja, the greatest festival for Saivas in any part of world.

Pusam in the next month of *Thai* occurs on the *Pournami* day and it is a day of festival in all Siva temples, particularly temples on the river banks. It is a day of great celebration in Tiruvidaimarudur. It is also a day of significance as the day of the passing away of St. Ramalingam at Vadalur.

The pournami day of the next month *Masi* is associated with the star *Magham*. This is an important festival connected with the river and sea baths. The Holi festival of North India and the Kama dahanam or the burning of Kama to ashes by Lord Paramesvara also occurs on this day. Kama dahanam or Kaman pandihai is a popular festival among all the rural labouring class of people today.

Lastly there is *Panguni Uttiram* on the *Pournami* day which is the day of the annual temple festival of ten days in all the important temples, called *Brahmotsava*.

This completes the cycle of the twelve full moon days of the year and the important festivals celebrated in association with those days and with a star, every month.

Festivals and the Phases of the Moon

As stated already, there are festivals round the calendar, celebrated every month. Every phase of the moon has important celebrations in different months.

The third phase, *Tritiya:* there is the *akshaya tritiyai* in *Vaikasi*, a day on which gifts are made and special temple celebrations are also undertaken. The fourth, *Chaturthi*, we have the very important festival, *Ganesa chaturthi*, in the month of *Purattasi*. The fifth, *Panchami* - the *Nagapanchami* and *Garuda panchami* in *Avani* and the *Vasantha panchami* in Masi. The sixth *Sashti* - *Skanda Shasti* in Aippasi, a Muruha celebration throughout Tamilnad. The seventh, *Saptami* - *Ratha saptami* in *Thai*, sacred to the Sun. The eighth *Ashtami*- This was an important festival in the temples in the the past but somehow this has disappeared altogether. It is still preserved in the Gokulashtami festival, Sri Jayanti, sacred to Krishna. The ninth, *Navami* Sri Rama Navami in *Panguni*. The tenth *Dasami,-Vijaya dasami* sacred to Sakti and Sarasvati in *Purattasi*. The eleventh, Ekadasi, - *Vaikuntha ekadasi* in *Marhali*, the most important Vaishnava festival; *Kaisika ekadasi* in the bright fortnight of *Karttikai* which celebrrtes the story of Nambaduvan the harijan singer of Tiruk-Kurumgudi. The twelfth, *Dvadasi* - the day following the two *ekadasis* mentioned earlier. The *dvadasi* following *Vaikuntha ekapasi* on the day on which the previous day's fast and vigil have been ended, is important. The fourteenth, *Chaturdasi* in Masi is held sacred to Siva and Sakti as *Sivaratri*. The *Naraka chaturdasi*, fourteenth day in the dark fortnight of Aippasi, is the most popular festival known as *Dipavali*.

The New Moon day and the Full Moon day have their own importance. A large number of people observe these days as days of *vrata*, days of special dedication to the departed

ancestors. Particularly on the *amavasya* (new moon) day, householders perform the *tarppana* or offering of oblation to the departed souls of the family. The *amavasya* days in the months of *Adi* and *Thai* are considered specially important in this regard.

Festivals and Nakshatras

The Tamil calendar marks a cycle of 27 stellar positions commencing from Asvati and ending with Revati. A particular star is said to be on the ascendant each day. In this manner of speaking, we may say that the festivals are regulated for most of the stars. Some of them will be mentioned here.

Karttikai - the annual *Karttikai dipam* celebrated in all temples and homes; the chief temple being Tiru Annamalai. (Of course the monthly Karttikai day also when many people fast as a religious observance for Muruha). *Rohini* is the birth star of Sri Krishna. *Tiru Adirai* the Ardra darsanam, Nataraja's dance at Chidambaram. *Punarpusam* - the birth star of Sri Rama. *Pusam* - the Thaip-pusam festival at Tiruvidaimarudur, Vadalur etc. *Magham* - the Masi magham festival throughout Tamilnad. *Puram* - Adip-puram festival for Sakti in all temples. *Uttiram* - Panguni Uttiram, *Brahmotsavam* festival in all temples; Ani uttiram being the *Anit-Tirumanjanam* again *abhishekam* to Nataraja and His Dance at Chidambaram. *Hastam* - in Panguni, the day of publication of Kamba Ramayana; nearly eleven centuries have now passed. *Chitrai* - Chitra Pournami in the month of Chitrai which occurs in conjunction with the star Chitrai. *Visakam* - Vaikasi Visakam festival. *Mulam* - the Avani mulam festival in Madurai and other places in honour of Manikkavacakar. *Tiru-Onam* in Purattasi, special for Vishnu. *Avittam* - in Avani, *Upakarma*.

Classification of Festivals

In the account of festivals in this book the festivals are described following the order of the Tamil months in which they occur; no classification has been attempted here for the purposes of celebration. However, we may be able to classify them under four major heads, although there may be many cases of overlapping. They will be the following heads :

1. Social festivals,
2. Religious festivals,
3. Literary festivals and
4. National festivals.

A few examples out of the traditional ancient festivals under each head may be mentioned :

Social - Dipavali, Pongal.
Religious - Vinayaka chaturthi, Avani Avittam.
Literary - Sarasvati puja.
National - New Year's Day.

What may be called cultural festivals can easily be seen to come under any one of four heads. Some of the religious festivals are also temple festivals. There are besides some festivals which are merely domestic, i.e., confined to the one family where they are celebrated. Besides the festivals, there are many *vratas* which have an equal importanee.

In the Sanskrit language, the *puranas* give accounts of festivals and the festivals may be said to have gained importance in society from the age of the *puranas*. Along with these, many *vrata kosas* have been compiled which deal with all important vratas which are always religious observances. They deal with the importance of a *vrata*, its occurrence, significance and manner of observance and the stories of those who benefited by observing the vrata concerned. Similarly, many classical books of a puranic character in the Tamil language deal with the *vratas* and important observances relating to the respective religions. As examples may be cited the *Upadesa kandams* by Koneriyappar and Jnanavraodayar, *Brahmottara Kandam* by Varatunga rama Pandiyar, *Kurma puranam* and *Kasi Khandam* by Ati Virarama Pandiyar, *Machapuranam* by Vadamalaiyappa Pillaiyan, and several others.

As has been explained in the case of each festival, many of them are religion-oriented and so associated with the local temple or some important temple of great renown in the whole country. But yet some of the more important festivals are not related to the temples. Many important ones are just social festivals. Examples are the Tamil New Year's Day, the *Adip-*

Perukku, the *Pongal* and so on. These are just social festivals, celebrated in the family and in the society unconnected with temple worship and without any puaranic legend.

The Hindu religious festivals in Tamil Nad easily resolve themselves into Saiva and Vaishnava and they always run on parallel lines. Many festivals require a vigorous personal discipline, often accompanied by partial fasting. The most important days of complete fasting are two - the Mahasivaratri for the Saiva and the Vaikuntha Ekadasi for the Vaishnava. They include fasting for the whole day and a vigil for the full night, with a breaking of the fast the next morning.

Similarly two *jayantis* or birthdays of *avatars*, Rama an Krishna, are celebrated by the Vaishnavas on the Sri Rami Navami and the Sri Jayanti days. These have a parallel in the Saiva celebration in the Ganesa chaturthi and Skanda shashd which are not birthdays but are the days on which the forcest of evil were overcome by Ganesa and Skanda respectively Ganesa nnd Muruha, considered to be the manifest forms of Siva Himself, are not held to be avatars and so a day for their *avatar* has nowhere been specified. Stil Vaikasi Visaka is contsidered the day of the natal star of Muruha. All these are grea occasions of fasting and rejoicing for entire families and communities.

These are religious festivals, no doubt. They are conducted both in the temples and in the homes

Social and religious festivals have not grown afresh or multiplied. But with the passing of time and with the emergence of an Independent India, new national festivals and literary festivals, bearing both on the past and on the present, have risen up in large numbers. They will be dealt with under their respective heads.

Vratas

Since we referred to vratas in a previous paragraph, we shall say here a few words on the subject. Observance of some important sacred days by some form of personal discipline is a feature common to all religions. We must remember that *vratas* are different from festivals and that the two are not the same. (*Vrata* is a single concept which however calls for several

connotations in English: it is a penance, a sacred how to observe certain austerities, including fasting, occasional vigils, continence etc.) Vratas have no collective celebration in society. They are purely individualistic. The person observing the particular *vrata*, fasts for the day or even from the previous evening, and occasionally as at the time of *Ekadasi* and *Sivaratri*, even keeps awake for the whole night. It ts *not* a social celebration for the whole family or for the entire community.

A few *vratas* are observed among all classes of the people but the *smarta* brahmins may be seen to observe scores of vratas. Sri Vaishnava brahmins hardly observe any vratas. The Jains may be said to observe the largest number of *vratas* in Tamilnad. There is a Tamil Jain work in manuscript called *Nonbu-katthai* (*nonbu*-Tamil for vrata), where 60 *vratas* are described in detail in the *manipravala* style. It is interesting to note that among the jain *vratas* are listed *Ananta vrata*, *Dipavali*, *Maghamasa vrata*, *Sivaratri* and *Sri Panchami* all of which can seen to be Hindu *vratas* even to this day.

People at all levels have a partial fast on certain days of the week and call it *vrata* of that *vara*; the most common are *Somavara* (Monday), *Sukravara* (Friday) and *Sanivara* (Saturday); on these days people either fast in the evening or take only milk and plantain fruits.

Many festivals are accompanied by vratas and partial fasting like Skanda shashti, Karttikai, Ekadasi and Sivaratri. Some vratas are also temple festivals. The fasting, even if it be for one day, or foregoing of one meal, has the salutary effect of an internal toning up of the human system.

There may appear to be a restriction on women observing any *vrata*. The tradition is that a woman shall not worship any one except her own husband. Classical literature would make much of this element. In cases of pre-marital love, it is is a sort of test to know whether an young girl has lost her heart to some lover. The girl is becoming thinner day by day and, to learn if it is really because she is love sick, she is asked by her people to pray to the crescent moon. If love had not come into her life, she would straightway pray. But if she had

set her heart on another lover, she would not consent to pray to the moon, because she connot pray to any one other than her husband or lover.

So that is the tradition. But if it were to be strictly enforced, no woman can pray, or go to a temple, or observe a penance or *vrata*. So the same tradition would say that she can do all these - pray or observe a *vrata*-with the consent or permission of her husband. Thus women may bes een to be free to observe *vratas*; in fact it is mostly the women who observe the *vratas*.

Some vratas have been described in the text. Uma-mahesvara vrata and Somavara vrata are some of the more important vratas.

VALUES

Festivals are occasions of joy. One does not celebrate sorrow. A festival is a celebration and so has come to mean joy, joy all round. So occasions of festivals unite all people and have been a means of uniting people and of integrating communities from the earliest times. Man does not live in isolation but lives as a member of a society to whose joys and pleasures he contributes and from which he also receives sustenance. So festivals have a great value for him.

We associate the Sanskrit word for festival *utsava* with a temple festival. But the Tamil word *vizha* has come to mean any festival, not only temple festival, and religious festival, but any social festival and even a national or literary festival. *Vizha* derives from the root *vizhai* which means to desire, and so *vizha* would mean the fulfilment of desire, and a celebration.

When people joined together there was joy and celebration and these came naturally to be festivals. People came together on some important occasion in the very early times and the memory of that occasion probably came to be remembered and celebrated with great rejoicing annually in later years. Thus came about the celebration of festivals. The festivals are of course associated with some kind of origin or cause of celebration, but this need not be pushed further back. We may rest content with saying that out of joy and mutual goodwill were born many of our great festivities.

Festivals had been compared by some to the carnivals of the West. Carnivals are mere fun and sensory enjoyment, materialistic to the core. We should remember that the case in India is different. Our recorded history, culture and civilization go back to more than 2500 years, two and a half millennia, and they hand down to us the culture which is at least five millennia old. There has been a continuity, one generation passing on its great legacy of culture down to the next. We certainly did have foreign cultures, languages, civilizations and domination. But

we did not succumb. There was an insuppressible vitality in our culture and our sense of values which continued to live and thrive under any type of adverse conditions and this feature has handed down to us an unbroken cultural heritage.

Although festivals are spontaneous expressions of joy and thanks-giving to nature if we may say so, they certainly have a core of *bhakti* in their celebration. They are a frequent reminder of God and surrender to a higher Power. They have also helped in a great measure to cultivate the mind of man and to evolve a uniform culture and have handed it down to generations of posterity.

The spirit of all festivals is joy, a fellow feeling and a surrender to the higher power; also an outcome of the society's feeling of thanksgiving.

Their aim is to remind man of God and induce him to contemplate on God as stipulated in the scriptures. Man is expected to suspend all his normal activities on the day of a festival and learn to concentrate upon something above him, to forget himself and if possible experience the joy of living as a responsible member of society and to learn the joy of giving to the working class and to the less fortunate, without expect ing anything in return. The festivals are recorded in our *Puranas* and each of them commemorates a great event like the *Kamadahana*, the burning of Kama or lust, and so on. These are occasions of joy, although fasts are prescribed as a means of bodily purification. When a festival is celebrated in honour of some deity, it is conceived of as an act of thanksgiving for some good to society that was done by the deity. It is a remembrance of how God suppressed evil in order that Good may prevail and happiness may come to all. Man, by the observance of the fasts and feasts, purifies himself and rises higher.

There are several marginal benefits resulting from any festival. For one thing, in the name of decoration, the whole house becomes clean. Pongal of course insists on a complete overhaul of the house, white washing and painting where necessary, discarding all accumulated and unwanted rubbish. Cobwebs, waste piles, and rubbish dumps one year old are then removed.

This apart, the periodical decoration as for example for *Navaratri* brings in its train a greater cleaning of the house at least partially, a brightening up and fresh illumination. *Ayudha puja* necessitates the cleaning up of all tools and instruments, giving them an enforced rest for a couple of days, dusting the books and the like. The New Year's Day causes a complete clean up of the entire house.

Apart from the cleaning on festive occasions, every Hindu home has its own traditional way of beautifying the entrance to the house, for welcoming Lakshmi every day. Early morning and in the evening, the yard at the entrance is swept clean, water is sprinkled and a *kolam*, small or big, is drawn there by the lady of the house or by the girl children. This gives a trim appearance to the whole house and lends a fine atmosphere. What is more valuable than a trim and chic environment to share one's life with? This can easily be seen in contrast with any neighbouring house which has no sprinkling of water and no *kolams*. Such a house will present a dismal and neglected sight which will be just the reverse of joy and merriment.

Add to this a small lighted *kuttuvilakku* in the evening at the entrance to every Hindu household and here we have the full measure of the joy which is obtained from a festival, just by following tradition, even without celebrating any festival. Such are the lasting benefits given to us by the tradition of festivals.

The latter half of the twentieth century witnesses loud declarations of rationalism by many who call themselves thinkers and they claim that they do not like to celebrate 'meaningless and superstitious' festivals in their homes. They are only to be pitied. Celebrations are not a mere matter of superstition. They are a matter of infinite joy to the children and the women folk even if the grown up men who claim to be radicals and atheists are unable to enter into the spirit of the festivals fully. The festivals build a bridge of understanding between the past and the present and also open up a path for the future. They are a social attempt to retain all the best in our past culture and customs and to hand them down to the future generations in an agreeable, enjoyable and elevating manner and they seem to per-

pectuate the best in them. Then, they are a bond in society which is calculated to develop good neighbourliness and harmony and partially remove the disparities arising out of class and wealth. Through the songs sung at the time of festivals, they also help to introduce language to the children and offer great scope for the development of all art and of creativity and the training of the eyes and ears and the skill of the hands and the fingers in handiwork. There is no other single element today which can be substituted for this that the festivals accomplish. We can only pity such scoffers and feel sorry for their children who are denied the innocent pleasures and free gains of life through no fault of their own.

Poetry of the Festivals

The Kaman Pandihai (festival of Cupid) is one which has great popularity among the lower levels of society. But it has not always been so, as we find Andal herself praying to him. Many of the Tamil epics narrate stories of heroines offering worship to Kaman (Manmata). This angel of love has given rise to a number of conventions in poetic tradition. The dart which he aims at the lovers are traditionally the five - the lotus, the mango flower, the asoka, the jasmine and the nelumbiam (lily). There darts are aimed at the different parts of the love-sick girl's body and they give rise to different emotions. The lotus aimed at the heart, makes her pine after the lover who has gone away from her for the moment, on some work or state errand. The mango flower aimed at her breasts, causes a tell-tale golden colour to appear thereon for the same reason. The asoka aimed at the eyes, creates an aversion to all food. The jasmine aimed at her head stretches her on the bed while the lily actually takes away her life. The concept of Kama can thus be seen to have given rise in turn to quite a volume of poetic concepts.

There is also another tradition regarding the blossoming of the flowering shrubs and trees. When they do not bear blooms in profusion during the flowering season, the tradition says that they give out flowers in abundance at a particular act from a virgin girl. The popular tradition is expressed in many poems, When a virgin girl kicks a *mara* tree (white Indian oak) with her

foot, it will bear flowers soon. If her shadow falls on a *champaka* tree, it will soon bloom. The *mahizh* (mimusops) will bloom if she casts a loving look on it. If she hugs an *asoka* tree or if it could hear her footfalls, it will bloom. The *kura* (wedera) tree blooms at her smile and laughter. When she befriends the *palai* tree it bears flowers. On the other hand, the padali tree will flower when she scolds it. When she takes food in the shade of a mango tree, the tree begins to flower. The madhavi (hiptage) plant will give out its fragrant flowers when she sings some tunes in it shade. The *punnai* tree (calophyllam) blooms when she dances before it. This fine poetic convention clearly illustrates how nature and people's lives had been closely interwoven with mortal people's lives, particularly with love.

All these are not mere whims of men of letters. They indicate how the people of those days were living a life in tune with nature and how they had a personal relationship with all of God's creatiou including the plant world. All these poetie concepts are closely linked with *vasantha,* the festival of spring.

The jasmine has always evoked fine feelings of tenderness and affection in the poets. Its pure white colour, fine arrangement of petals, its opening exactly at a specified hour of the evening and its lingering sweet fragrance have endeared it to poets. The 'Sangham poetry tells us that Pari, the great warrior patron of the period, returning from a hunt saw a large jasmine creeper *mullai* covering a small bush with its shoots. It was in full bloom, its snow white flowers in sharp contrast with its own dark green foliage in the gathering evening dusk. As Pari looked at the *mullai,* he saw it send out scores of shoots with buds, flowers and foliage; it had covered the entire bush, and the shoots had no more support, but were stretching out into the void with nothing to hold on. His heart was touched by the condition of the plant. It was his duty as ruler of the land to lend support to those who needed it. His artistic mind at once took in the helpless state of the plant. With no hesitation he drove his chariot close to the bush, trained the shoots on the chariot and walked home. No greater tribute can be paid to the flower culture of the Tamils than this most poignant story.

In love poetry *mullai* is the symbol of purity and chastity and we have a fine story of a festival for the blooming of the *mullai* It is a poetic convention to say that an young girl expecting a marriage alliance, raises a *mullai* plant close to her house, with care and love. The belief is that when the plant blooms, she also would get her marriage solemnized. The *mullai* plant grew and very soon flower buds appeared on it and one fine evening it burst into bloom. Naturally the girl was very happy and she celebrated the occasion by organizing a festival to celebrate the event. The Tamil *Naidatam* saya that the uproar in the great city of Nala, when girls celebrated the *mullai* bloom festival in this manner and the great orchestra music celebrating the marriage of young men and women, even excelled the roar of the waves of the sea.

This concept of considering the plant in a human relation ship is further extended in a verse in *Natrinai* (172). A lover going over to meet his lady love tries to flirt with her in the shade of a *punnai* tree. In her early years her mother had told her that the tree had been lovingly reared with milk and water and it stood in the relationship of an younger sister to the girl. She now remembers this and so tells her lover out of her own sense of modesty that they should not indulge in love pranks in the presence ot the tree.

Literature and Festivals

Temple festivals have given rise to large number of new poetic patterns and motifs. The most well known is the *pavai* song in Saivism and Vaishnavism. The song is now associated with the pre-dawn bath in the month of Marhali and going the rounds of the temple and temple streets. St. Andal sang the first *Tiruppavai* and Manikkavacakar sang next his *Tiruempavai*. Both the songs are today rich treasures best owed by the two saints on their respective religions and the Tamil people in general. Others in later centuries have followed them with many such pavai songs; notable are those of Tattuvarayar.

Tiruppallandu is a similar song purporting to pray for long life to the Lord Himself, so that He may shower His grace on mankind for all time. The story is that Periyalvar first sang his song on Vishnu. When Vishnu in all his glory decked with flowers, apparel and jewels went in a procession along the streets of the city, the Alvar, who constituted him self as the mothe of the One who had no mother and no father, sang this song in order to remove any evil eye likely to be cast by non-religious persons. From this day, this has been an item of devotional singing in Vishnu's presence in all his temples. Two centuries later, Sendanar, a harijan bhakta sang a *Pallandu* on Nataraja during the Ardra Darsana car festival and it is equally popular in the Siva temples. (This has been elaborately described in the section on that festival (pages 202-203).

Tiruppalliyeluchi is yet another. This is a song intended to wake up the Lord in the temple, early in the morning in order that He may shower His grace on mankind. Of course, the Lord does not sleep and it is man that confers on Him a sleep in the night and a waking up in the morning. Tondar-adippodi alvar sang the first *Palliyeluchi* on Lord Ranganathar at Srirangam followed by Manikkavacakar on the Lord at Tirupperundurai. All the songs form part of the respective canons. In recent times the great national poet Bharati sang a Tiruppallieluchi on the Bharatamata.

Similar songs sung on temple festival occasions are many. They are modelled on the rituals and the folk patterns of songs suited for such occasions. Some instances are *Tirup-Ponnusal* for the swing, *Tirup-Porchunnam* for preparing the bathing powder for the Lord's bath and some others. *Tirumanjanakkatiyam* of a later day is also a song for the occasion of the Lord's bath.

In many temples, there are songs for the different types of festivals. *Vahanakkavi* stating the mounts for the procession on the different days of the festival, *Tiru-olakkappattiu* a song celebrating the durbar of the deity, *usal* as stated earlier, *Tirunalkavi* and so on. *Kavadiccindu* is a new pattern of

poem invented by Annamalai Reddiyar for the singing of the devotees who carry a *kavadi* for Muruha in order that the tedium of their trek to the temple may not be felt. The song is sung in chorus; the leader sings the song and the others follow. His inspired new experiment had caught on and become immensely popular, and time adds to its popularity. It had no successful imitators.

Tiru udal is one of the festivals in Siva temples. It has not been described earlier. Humour and poetry go to make up the festival. Nataraja on the Ardra day returns to the temple, but is refused admission by Sakti. St. Sundarar for whom Tyagaraja at Tiru Arur once acted as a messenger of love to the house of Paravai, now acts as a messenger from Nataraja to Sakti. A final reunion is effected. Oduvars, following St. Sundarar the messenger, sing verses from the Devaram and this is an item of interest, giving literary and musical training to many bhaktas in the locality.

The fact that the Chola emperors had made liberal endowments to temple oduvar for reciting *Devaram* songs had helped literary taste as well as music to be developed among the mass in their days.

Social Concern

The festivals always are of a socialistic pattern. In every case the poor and the less gifted are thought of and provision made for them. All food offerings offered to the deities on the various festive occasions like Chitrapournami, Pongal, Mattup-pongal, Sarasvati puja etc. are distributed to the working class; distribution of slates or pencils on the occasion of the first initiation of the child into the school from a well-to-do family or average one; distribution of clothes to teachers on this day and even on the Dipavali day; distribution of oil and powder and eatables on the Dipavali day; jaggery, fruits and the like on the Pongal and Mattup-pongal day, besides paddy, may be mentioned.

The importance and social value of festive celebration can be realized from the fact that Saint Tiru Jnanasambandhar refers to a series of monthly festivities in his song beginning

mattitta punnai-yum kanal mada mayilai sung in the Mayilappur (Mylapore) temple to bring back to life Pumpavai from her ashes. He asks her, "Will you go away without witnessing these festivals in the Kapalisvara temple?" In the first ten verses of the song of eleven verses, he refers to the respective monthly festivals beginning from the month of *Purattasi*. They are the festival of *feeding* of the Sivabhaktas (on the *Purattadi* day in *Purattasi*), the (Tiru) *Ona vila* in Aippasi, the festival of lights on the *Karttikai* day in Karttikai, the *Ardra* festival in *Marhali*, the *Pusa* festival in Thai. the festival of *sea bath* in Masi, the *Uttira oli vila* in *Panguni*, the *Ashtami* festival in *Chitrai*, the *swing* festival in Vaikasi, and the *Pavitrotsava* (*perumsanthi vizha*) in Ani (also in Adi and Avani) Saint Tiru Jnanasambandhar was a saint in his teens who attained final beatitude at the age of sixteen. Children have always a great longing for play and festivity. Though Sambandhar was a saint, yet the festivals seem to have had a great attraction for him and he sings of them serially and in the proper order in the *Pumpavaippattu*. Some of the festivals mentioned by him as those on feeding, the *ona vila* and the *ashtami vila* are obscure today.

Two of the greatest national festivals are Dipavali and Pongal. These are associated only with the home and not with the temple. A greater importance and rejoicing attaches to these two because these are celebrated by all, are accompanied by presents of various kinds to labourers and artisans, and are celebrated by men and women alike, the children taking the major part. These two concern the *entire society* as no other festivity does. Probably the *Sarasvati puja* may rank with these to a lesser degree.

The festivities of the Tamils other than the religious are mostly not only of a pattern of communal rejoicing but also of a socialistic pattern, where the key note seems to be sharing with the less fortunate, as can be seen from Dipavali and Pongal. The temple *utsavas* or ten day celebrations also reflect this trend, when food is distributed to the temple workers and the poor. The Annabhisheka is of cooked rice and is used to cover the Sivalinga and on removal in the afternoon the food is presented to the poor.

A practice in the Tirup-perunturai under the Tiru Avaduturai adhinam may be mentioned here. This temple is located in an arid area where only poor people live and they live in semi-famine conditions. It has been the practice here to cook large quantities of food, present it to the deity in the temple and then sell it away in cup-fulls at two annas a cup. One cup, in the first half of this century, was adequate for a full meal in a family of four. The average poor people in the place *never* cooked any rice in their homes. They simply prepared a *kulambu* and used it in the noon, night and the next morning, for their meal provided by the temple rice. (In the sixties and the seventies of this century, tenants no longer pay any rent to the temple and the temple no longer has the necesssary rice to supply to the poor people.)

The above instances will show that all our festivities in a rural setting are democratic and mass-oriented. They fully catered to the needs of the poor and the deserving.

Festivals and Children

Domestic festivals are always associated in Hindu society with women. Whatever may the significance of a festival, the home celebration is organized and conducted by women. Men here are merely helpers. Their active participation is limited. Because apparently, the joy of celebration is always with women and of course with children, from whom they are inseparable.

If we make a rapid survey of all the festivals, we are bound to arrive at the conclusion that festivals are intended to shed light and joy on child life. We shall notice briefly the participation of the children in a few of the activities. The Tamil New Year's Day-gathering of the tiny margosa flowers for preparing *rasam* on this day; Chitra pournami — the very fact of placing a palm leaf scroll and a stylus for Chitraputra and the reading of a few lines at least from his story in the ballad in his home; the mango festival in Ani; the Adipperukku on the 18th of Adi when they build a miniature chariot and draw it to the Kaveri; the limitless joy and creative activity connected with Vinayaka Chaturthi which brings into play all the hidden talents of the child and the celebration with modakam and kozhukkattai; of

course his own investiture the with the sacred thread during Avani avittam; then Krishna Jayanti and the variety of sweets prepared for Krishna; Sarasvati puja, a festival principally for the girl children for ten days when they go out handing out invitations, arrangement of the kolu, the spirit of emulation of the children and the work of dismantlingthe *kolu* on the last day; of course Dipavali with its new clothes and variety of sweets with plenty of crackers for light and sound; Karttikai dipam with its eatable pori, the lighting of the sokkappanai, and their own *porisutral*; now a days the pavai songs for girl children in Marhali, the glorious Pongal and Mattu Pongal with Karinal the day for games; Masimagham and the excursion to the sea and when this is not possible to the river; lastly the gala temple festivals on Panguni Uttiram - all these are children oriented. What shall we say about such festivals like the car festival and the *teppotsava* in a temple?

We can very well believe that our ancient forefathers were well aware of the need for involving the child in all social activities and so planned the festival activities in this manner. Festivals are holidays and so they are days of mirth and fun. Plenty of sweets also accompany mirth amidst us. The elders may have problems connected with the festivals but the children are care free and they enjoy the festivals with great gusto unreservedly. Many articles or many luxurious things may not be quite necessary; with their innate trait of make believe they supply the missing things and give themselves up to the enjoyment of the very idea of a festival, a day out of the ordinary, a holiday,

Marutanai decoration is a favourite with the children and the women folk on the occasion of all major festivals, This is something like the modern nail polish. The leaves of the bushy plant, *lawsonia alba* (*marutanai*) are collected a day earlier and they are ground into a fine paste, with a little water. This paste is applied to the finger tips to cover the nail and the first joint and also on the palms, in some artistic design. It is also applied to the toes, the sole of the feet and the upper portion of the feet in the design of an anklet. This decoration is done just before bedtime. The next morning, on getting up from the bed

women and children wash off the paste. It leaves on the skin and nails a crimson hue which lasts for about a month. The colouring is quite handsome and even boys and grown ups go in for this application of *marutanai*. It is of course a must for any young girl at the time of her marriage. This item of personal decoration costs absolutely nothing, except the labour of grinding the leaves.

Festivals and Dances

The Tamllian has Nataraja, the King of Dance, the Cosmic Dancer, who dances in the cosmos, in the individual heart and in the atom, according to modern science. Stop his dances, stop the heart, and there is no life. Dance had occupied a prominent position in the culture and literature of the Tamils. One of the three divisions of Tamil literature is dance. Religion was the soul of all activity in Hindu socity and thus dance had assumed great importance. In temple rituals, gita (music) vadya (instrumental music) and nritya (dance) were the three *upacharas* at the end of the sixteen *upacharas*. Chola monarchs had made great endowments in all the major temples for these three and they had been continuously existing as essential features of temple activity through more than ten centuries. Since these were thus dedicated to God, they maintained a high level of culture. Since all festivity had been religion based, music and dance had been important factors in all festival celebrations.

Bharata natyam which is growing in importance in social activity in the present day, though taking a commercial form, was part of the festivities of the society in the past. There were dance parties in all the temple festivals and in all the marriage functions even in average families. The *kuravanji* which had a theme like a musical dance drama was evolved from the temple festivities of Tiru-kutralam.

Kavadi is also a popular form of dance. Hundreds of people of take out a *kavadi* and march in large groups to a Muruha temple as Tiruttani or Palani. The *kavadi chindu* was evolved at a song to help the long trek of the devotees to the pletem.

Kummi and *kolattam* are features still in vogue amidst girl children during the Navaratri festivals. Before the modern education made its ravages into rural society, the *maha nonbu* was a gala festival among school children who performed *kummi* and *kolattam*, where eight, twelve or sixteen girls did the fine tattoo of plaiting with multicoloured strings attached to a central hook, was a great attraction till the recent past. The *Baghavata mela* still performed in some parts of the country like Melattur in the Tanjavur district is also a dance drama associated with festivals, celebrating religious stories like that of Prahladas

In the seven shrines around Tiruvarur, known as the *Saptavitanga sthalas*, Thyagaraja is carried in a palanquin by temple servants and they perform dance there called a *vitanga* dance, which is different in each place. The music for the dance is only the drum called *suddha maddhala*. The shrines are Tiru Arur, Nallaru, Nagai, Karayil, Kolili, Vaymur and Maraikkadu and the dances are called *ajapa natanam*, *unmatta natanam*, *taranga natanam*, *kukkuta natanam*, *bringhi natanam*, *kamala natanam* and *hamsa natanam*. There is also a special *natanam* for the Gajasamharamurti at Valuvur.

Along with the Mariyamman cult, the *karaham* dance ha. become a universal favourite. The dancer placing a pot decorated with flowers and margosa leaves, performs many acts of a dance, standing, lying down and rolling on the ground, without disturbing the pot or *karaham* on the head, or touching it with the hands. This is a wonderfully dexterous act. The *poykkal kudirai* dance by a man and a woman, walking on stilts like a rider on a faked up horse is a great piece of mass attraction in Mari festivals.

Yet, it has to be said that dance as the unalloyed expression of joy and celebration in society has greatly receded from the cultured or highly sophisticated society: if it exists, it is only in primitive conditions and not at civilized levels in the modern day.

Integration with the Five Elements

There is nothing wrong in admitting the fact that even today we worship the five elements. These are the forces which

primitive man had to reckon with even before the thought of God came to him. In Saivism, five places in particular, which enshrine Siva, are considered to represent the five elements.

Prithvi the earth is denoted by Tiru Arur in Tanjavur district. The Sivalinga here is said to be mere earth, an anthill, known as Valmikanatha (*vamika* - white ant). This is a very large temple and the city is said to have been the capital of the Chola dynasty in the B.Cs.

Water *(appu* or *apah)* is represented by Tiru Anaikka (Jambukesvaram) which is now part of the larger city of Tiruchirappalli. Even today. in this city, the Sivalinga in the sanctum is always encircled by water, even in the severest summer.

Vayu (air) has the shrine of Tiruk-kalatti (Kalahasti) to its credit. It is held very sacred by the memory of Saint Kannappa, who dug out his eyes in attempting a transplant to the eyes of the Lord which were oozing blood. The place is now in the Andhra Pradesh.

Tejas (fire) represented by the shrine at Tiru Annamalai in North Arcot district. The hill itself is said to be a Sivalinga, named Arunachala, the Hill of fire. The story of Vishnu and Brahma trying to discover the foot and the crown in the *joti* in the place is well known.

And lastly the fifth element *Ether* (Akasa) is dedicated to Chidambaram, where we have an *Akasa Linga* and where Siva as Lord Nataraja is performing His eternal cosmic Dance in the Dance Hall, which is the *Chitakasa*, the Hall of Supreme Consciousness. Festivals of varying degrees of importanee are celebrated in all these five places.

Considerable importance is attached to the hills and rivers in the Hindu religion, particularly in the Saiva religion. Hence many festivals may be said to be hill-based and river-based. The Himalayas, as Himavan the King of Mountains, is legendarily the father of Parvati, the consort of Siva, Her very name means the daughter of the Mountain. Then Kailas, the Hill of

Siva is one of the peaks on the Himalayas. Even in the present day till this hill area was annexed by China, hundreds of devout people in India considered it the greatest aim of their lives to go upto the foot of the Kailas hill and have a *darsan* of it. We have already spoken of Tiru Annamalai. Its great annual festival of Karttikai in the month of that name is one of the greatest national festivals of Tamilnad. Sri sailam (Sri Parvata or Mallikarjunam) is a hill shrine sanctified by the hymns of the Nayanmar, now in the Andhra Pradesh. There are many more hills, shrines of Siva, such as Ratnagiri (Tiru Vatpokki), Tiru Vengi (Eangoy) malai, both in Tiruchi districts and the famous health resort at Tiru Kutralam in Tirunelveli district are some of the important few among the many.

Again, Tamil literary convention would set apart all hills to Muruha, who is called the Lord of the Hills - Palani, Parangunram, Tiruttani, Ilanji Tiruchengodu, Chennimalai, Mayilam, Vallimalai and a host of others. To add weight to this characteristic. even an important shrine in the plains is made a hill and dedicated to Him as Swamimalai in Tanjavur district.

Nor is Vaisnavism lagging behind in the matter of dedication of the elements to its Supreme being, Lord Vishnu. The mythical ocean of milk is His place of rest and there He is floating on a banyan leaf, reclining in a conscious sleep (arituyil). At Sri Rangam, situated at the place of separation of the Kaveri into two large streams, He is lying on His Adhisesha couch, circled by the waters of the Kaveri. Tondar Adippodi alvar would hold the Kaveri even more sacred than the Ganga because Ranganatha is reclining only in the middle of the Kaveri and not of the Ganga. Several other *Rangams* in the course of the river are all dedicated to Him-the Seringapatam fort where Tippu surrendered to the British, Tiru Indalur at Mayuram, and other places.

Not only the waters, but even some hills. It is well known that the Tiru Venkatam hill has been dedicated to Vishnu from immemorial times; it has been said to be the northern border of Tamilnad where Vishnu is in the standing posture. It is now in Chittur district of Andhra Pradesh but that it was a Tamil

temple is attested by the name of the hill as Tirumalai and the name of the city as Tiruppati which are yet only Tamil names. This temple is the richest in all India, fetching an annual income of several crores of rupees.

Alaharmalai near Madurai is one of the ancient of temples of Vishnu known in the classics as Tirumalirum solai. It is also known as the shrine of Palamudirsolai, the sixth camp of Lord Muruha in the Sangham age. The Simhachalam and Bhadrachalam in Andhra Pradesh are other hill stations of Vishnu which have an all India importance.

Poor Feeding

In all public (temple) festivals, be they for a day or for a month, there is always a feeding. There were several charitably disposed persons who had created liberal endowments for feeding a limitless number of people on the temple festival days. Feeding of beggars was there; they were given lumps of cooked and prepared rice food once a day which they carried with them and ate at leisure in one meal or even two or three meals. But poor feeding in the past meant also the feeding of brahmins. Poor and indigent brahmins came in large numbers to take part in festivals, bathe in the temple tanks and offer worship. They had come over long distances and generally had no place to go to for food. All of them had a stern personal discipline which forbade them taking food in all sundry places. Most of them knew to recite the Vedas and this function they discharged in the temple. Hence the public took upon itself the duty of feeding these men in an honourable way for the duration of the festivals. Brahmin feeding was therefore said to learn merit and there were scores of *chatras* or *dharmasalas* in important places like Madurai, Sri Rangam, Tiru Anaikka, Tiru Vidaimarudur, Tiru Aiyaru, Mayuram, Chidambaram, Tiru Annamalai and so on, to feed hundreds of brahmins daily. Feeding of members of other communities as a rule was rare in the past.

But in the case of festivals conducted in the houses, such as Pongal, Dipavali, Vinayaka Chaturthi and Saraswati puja,

there was always a general poor feeding in the each home for the dependents of the household and the artisans of the village.

The Kamba Sevai described in Part III is a large scale poor feeding in the name of religion. Similarly the *sraddha* ceremony or anniversary day of one's own ancestors celebrated in the home is also a poor feeding festival on a small scale. Formerly we had a *mahesvara puja* on the anniversary days of saints, which was only a poor feeding in another name.

Siva bhaktas were worshipped and fed; in the Saiva religion, the person who wears the emblems of Siva is to be worshipped as Siva himself. Beggars with ash- smeared forehead, sometimes in orange coloured cloth and holding a begging bowl were fed in large numbers on such days. Then there is the Siruttondar *amudu padaiyal* day, when such beggars are fed and honoured in memory of the Bhairava who appeared before Siruttondar.

Thus poor feeding may be seen to be the centre of all Saiva festivals and celebrations. The same concept is there in the Vaishnava religion. Bhagavan is worthy of our worship; the acharya is even more worthy ; the bhagavatar as the servant, a devotee of Vishnu, is still more. But in practice, this has got considerably restricted in meaning. The Vaishnavas consider only brahmins as Vaishnava bhagavatas and so they would not give even a single morsal of food to a non-Vaishnava or a non-brahmin. Moreover, as most of the benefactors of Vishnu temples are not-Vaishnava brahmins, the giving of temple food offerings as prasadam to such people is prescribed; but it is never followed.

The brahmin poor feeding on important occasions is called a *samaradanai;* the meaning of the term is worship of all alike. But with the brahmins, it is only worship of the brahmin. With the Velalear it is the feeding of all the poor and hungry in the worship as the Mahesvara, the Sivabaktha.

Whatever this may be, we may note that all these observances are in tune with the Upanishadic dictum, *atithi devo bhava.*

Festivals as a leveller

The temple festivals act as a leveller and particularly the Bramotsavam festival in a temple acts as a leveller of all castes and classes. The car festival in particular is recognized as the greatest leveller of social barriers. This can be particularly seen in Tiru Arur. The temple car (chariot) was burnt by some accident about four decades ago and a new one was constructed later. 'The Beauty of the Tiru Arur temple car' is a proverb. The new constructed car is a very heavy one fitted with steel tyres. It is drawn and pushed by several tractors and bulldozers today. Yet we find thousands of men of all classes tugging at the two heavy ropes and drawing the car along macadamized streets, which were mere mud in the past. On the day of the car festival, all untouchability in the past had been kept away. Any body may jostle with any other and no pollution was attached to any one engaged in drawing the car. When the streets were all mere mud in the past, many hundreds of the people were requisitioned from neighburing villages also for drawing, the car. The harijan community people were engaged in the work and all people mingled with them freely.

There is a fine story in the *Periya puranam* bearing on this subject. St. Naminandi was one of the sixtythree saints glorified in the *puranam*. He was a brahmin by birth. He worshipped the *Panguni uttiram* festival at Tiru Arur and also the visit of the Lord to a neighbouring place called Tiru Manali. Here there was no privileged class but all classes worshipped him on an equal basis. The visit was in a sense akin to the car festival. Naminandi worshipped the regal court array of the Lord's durbar at this place and returned home. His wife invited him as usual to perform the Lord's worship in the home, light the sacrificial fire, and have his dinner before retiring to bed. Naminandi said, "I am now returning after having a *darsan* of the Lord of Tiru Arur at Manali and since all classes of people jostled there, I am having pollution. So I have to purify myself by a bath before performing a puja. Hence get the water for my bath ready".

His wife hastened to get the water ready. Meanwhile by the grace of Siva, Naminandi had a short nap in which he had a dream. In the dream, the Lord of Arur appeared before him and said: "My wise brahmin, don't you know, all people born at Arur are our forces?" Poor Naminandi was startled. He felt great remorse for his thought of pollution, told his wife of the dream, rushed to Tiru Arur in the morning and fell at the feet of Siva there and begged for His forgiveness. This Naminandi had been a contemporary of Sambandhar and Appar who referred to him as the yardstick for measuring a devotee.

This is just one instance to show that the *bramotsava* and the car festivals bring home to all people the oneness of mankind Conducted at different times in the different important shrines, they strengthen the religious foundations of the pilgrims who visit the shrines and also provide them with considerable aesthetic pleasure. During the festivals social status is forgotten and mankind is seen to be one. This also helps to remove the impurities in the soul leading to liberation.

The temple chariot is fully carved in wood with all forms of deities and legendary figures and the dellght they give to the people is inexhaustible. The deity is kept higher up inside the car so that persons looking from a distance can also have a good vision of it. The chariot is itself decorated gaily and widely with coloured canopies and gaudy festoons and multicoloured ornamental *tombai*. These attract vast crowds of all classes and all levels of society, young and old, men and women, and they get a treasurable experience for the rest of the year till the next car festival.

Conclusion

A survey of the social and religious festivals and the sacred days set forth in this volume will indicate the prevalence of their observance throughout this sub-continent from the Himachalam to the cape Kanyakumari and from the Burma border to to the Pakistan border. Age has not affected the celebration nor the suppression by the British, the French or the Portuguese. Indians living in outlying countries across the border and in

overseas countries also zealously celebrate them. Jains and Sikhs also share in a large number of these festivals. In a sense we may assert that the festivals had been a gteat integrating and cementing force among the various clans and tribes, regions, languages and caste levels. They still continue their integrating influence.

Pilgrimages continue the task of integration as no other single element in culture has done. People trek long distances go to inaccessible places, shrines, tanks, confluences, rivers, forests and hills and even the snow-capped mountain tops, buoyed up by a sense of religious duty, boldly meeting the challenges of food or unbearable changes in the weather, difficulties of travel and the differences in language. Externally, the people may appear to be different. but at heart they are all one, racial, linguistic and similar differences are understood and tolerated.

The festivals keep alive the great ideals and the memory of the great men and women who have lived for the nation, its language and its religion and left their imprint on the history of the race. The stories of Savithri and Arundati, or Tilakavati, Karaikal Ammai and Andal continue to be beacon lights to womanhood, remembered on particular days and leading them forward towards the veneration of noble ideals. The poor feeding on the innumerable festivals including the annual *sraddha* days and days like the *Ayudha puja* and *Pongal* continue to hold aloft the great humanism of the Tamil race, voiced by the poet of two thonsand years ago in the lines "Any place is my place and all the people are my kin."

PART II

MONTHLY FESTIVALS

1. CHITRAI

THE TAMIL NEW YEAR'S DAY

Occurrence

On the 14th of this month, April 1978, is born Kalayukti, the fifty first year of the Tamilian reckoning of the Jupiter cycle of sixty years.

Every civilized nation in the world has its own system of reckoning time; this begins with the smallest unit, the second, and goes up to the largest unit, the year. The year is divided into months and the first day of the first month is the New Year's Day. The New Year's Day for the Tamil speaking people generally occurs on the 13th (rarely on the 14th) of April and it is a day of great importance for the Tamilians wherever they live, irrespective of caste or creed or clime. The first day of the Tamil month of *Chitrai* is the New Year's Day, also called the *Chaitra vishu.* This is the day when the Sun is considered to enter the constellation Aries (*Mesham)* of the Zodiac after completing one full cycle.

The Tamil reckoning of the year is on the basis of the solar month like many other systems of the world. In this system, the year is the period of time which the earth takes for making one full round of the sun. The Tamil word for month is *tingal,* which is also the term for the moon. That means that the Tamil people were once computing their year on the basis of the lunar month, which was from one full moon to the next. This has been later dropped in favour of the solar month which is also the unit in the modern astronomical year. However the lunar month is observed in many regions.

Significance

An ingenious explanation is also given for beginning the year from this month. The constellation is figured as a ram

and so is called mesham (ram). Another word in Sanskrit for ram (or sheep) is *aja; aja* also means 'not born'; so, that which was not born till then is born now, and hence this has been considered the birth of a new year and its first month.

The New Year's Day is expected to usher in new life and happiness to all concerned. Many pious resolutions are adopted on this day. Hence all people take care not to harbour bad thoughts, not to use bad words and not to do bad deeds. Elders never use harsh words to one another or towards children, even though there may be great provocation; servants are not scolded, and children are enjoined not to quarrel, not to indulge in mischievous pranks or use harsh words, or remain idle. The belief is that if this day goes off happily and usefully, the whole year will turn out to be happy and useful, and if this day saw anything bad or did not do anything useful, the whole year would give bad experiences and would result in frustration.

Observance

As usual, a *puja* is performed to the Sun god in an open yard. The whole house is meticulously cleaned and washed. A place in the yard is cleaned and decorated with kolam and festoons are hung round. The sun god is invoked as in most other cases on a pinch of ground turmeric paste (or of fresh cowdung), placed on a decorated wooden pedestal or on a pair of decorated fresh bricks. It is flanked on either side with a *kuttuvilakku* (standing lamp in bronze, silver, or ever silver steel in the modern day) and a rice offering is served in front of the lamp usually on five plantain leaves Ghee, sugar and plantain fruits are added besides the customary coconut and betels. Sugar cane is rare in this month, and if available it is also added. The *puja* is a sort of welcome to the New Year. After *puja*, the food served is distributed to the working class men and women of the village, such as the washerman, barber, carpenter etc.

The new year day also ushers in the summer. On this day distribution of fans made of palmyrah leaves, and of diluted butter milk to quench the thirst of the travellers, is considered a

sacred duty; this distribution continues for some more months. There is always a kind of rest house (or *chatram*) on the main road junction in every village, and butter milk (*nir-mor*) is given to the wayfarers from this place during the hot hours of the day.

Reading of the *panchangam* is an important ritual in the rural communities on this day. The name *panchanga* means five parts; they are the day of the week, *tithi* or phase of the moon, *yogam*, *nakshatram* and *karanam*. These five components of the calender figure prominently in selecting any suitable occasion for an auspicious purpose. At an auspicious hour in the local temple, the *purohit* of the village goes over there with the new almanac and performs a short *puja* for it and then begins to read therefrom the position of the stars and planets etc. during the year and foretell many things affecting the rural life, such as rains, the productivity in paddy, other cereals, pulses and oil seeds, the health of cows and bulls, price fluctuation of the agricultural produce etc. Naturally these are of immediate interest to the agricultural people. The forecast of the *panchangam* broadly comes true and even if it does not come true, it helps the people philosophically to reconcile themselves to adverse natural conditions beyond their control. If conditions are prosperous nobody naturally bothers about the forecast. The *purohit* is rewarded for his reading. There is of course festive food in the home.

Younger people prostrate themselves before the elders and obtain their blessings on this day.

Most rural business men in Tamilnad close their accounts on the previous day and open a new account with the Tamil New Year. So this day marks the opening of the new account by all such people, with considerable rejoicing.

Special Features

Our ancestors had been leading a life in tune with nature and we find the plant world associated with many of our *vratas* and festivals; e. g. *sesbania* (agatti) with *Vaikuntha ekadasi*

vilva with *Sivaratri*, *plantains* with *pongal*, lemon leaves with mattup-pongal, *aruhu* with *Varalakshmi vrata*, *erukku* flower and *jambu* fruit with *Vinayaka Chaturthi*, and so on. In the same manner, the vembu *(margosa)* is associated with the New Year's Day. During this season, the *margosa* is in full bloom. It has great medicinal and prophylactic properties. The use of margosa blooms in the food on this day is prescribed by custom. The ground under the *margosa* tree is swept well and kept clean and even. Some times the area is even covered with cloth. The tiny flowers drop down on this cloth, are gathered up and dried in the sun and stored for future use. On this day they are added to the *rasam* preparation; or a *paccadi* (side dish) is prepared with *veppam-pu* and sugar; the flowers give a slightly bitter taste and not a disagreeable flavour. *Veppam-pu rasam* as it is called is often prepared in the subsequent months also with the dried flowers stored up and this is considered generally to tone up the human system.

A sophisticated explanation has also been offered for the bitter *veppam-pu*. If we are accustomed to the use of this bitter thing on this first day, we would naturally be able to withstand any bitter or sour things of life in the course of the whole year, without much sulking or disappointment.

Legends

Many legends are associated with this day. One is that Brahma the Creator commenced his work of creation on this day - originally the first day of the dark fortnight and so it became the first day of the year and, since it marked the beginning of all *yugas*, it was called the *yugadi* festival day. (The yugadi for the Telugu people commences a month earlier.) Another says that this was the day on which Rama, victorious over the defeat and destruction of Ravana, returned to Ayodhya and was crowned.

Yet another refers to the origin of the cycle of sixty years in the Hindu calendar, beginning from *Prabhava* the first year and ending with *Akshaya*, the last year. Sage Narada, the eternal *bramachari* (bachelor), once went to Vaikuntha, the

abode of Vishnu. Lakshmi who was seated beside Vishnu rose and went inside on seeing the sage. Narada pointed out that there was no need for her to get out of his presence, since he was a confirmed bachelor, one who had conquered the senses (a *jitendriya*.) Vishnu pointed out to him that no one can get over *maya*, which was able to seduce even the gods. Narada desired to see that Maya. Vishnu asked him to bathe in a tank on the earth. When Narada did so, he was transfermed into a woman and his guide Narayana had vanished. The transformed woman forgot all her earlier history. Kala-dvaja (one whose banner was Time) came there, the two liked each other and out of their union were born sixty sons, who were given the sixty names *Prabhava* etc., the names of the sixty years in the Jupiter cycle. In time they were all killed in a war with a neighbouring state. Then Narada regained his natural sage form and realised the power of *maya*.

This story is narrated in a different version also. It so happened that Narada who was a brahmachari externally, had really sexual longing when he happened to see, while bathing in the Ganges, fish in conjugal happiness. Vishnu thereupon made him rise as a woman after a bath in the river and Himself wedded her, causing the birth of the sixty sons.

Literature

In a song vibrant with a new and resurgent vigour, the Tamil national poet Subrahmanya Bharati bids adieu to the old, weak and outmoded India, and welcomes a new and renascent India in ringing tones. We may give here a few lines of his, which are most relevant on this occasion as dismissing the old year as it were and ringing in the New Year. Let us now dismiss the old year :

You weak-shouldered mannikin,
away, away;

You with the shrunken heart,
away, away;

You of the listless face.
away, away;

You with lack-lustre eyes,
away, away...

You'd learn, not
the mother's speech

But divers languages strange;
away, away!

You'd talk of a hundred tomes,
not profit from one true book;
away, away.

Do you prate of a hundred castes,
Yet fail in the duties of any?
away, away.

Do you quote a hundred laws,
And genuflect for a pice?
away, away.

On the New Year Day, old writing is swept clean and new writing is begun. Now we shall welcome the New Year, the year which will usher in a youthful nation born of Bharati's dreams:

Come, come, you with the shining eyes,
Come, come, you with the steely heart;
Come, come, you with the honeyed speech,
Come, broad-shouldered Titan,
Welcome!
Come, come with a crystalline mind,
Come, come to purge meanness here, welcome!
Come, come to commiserate the poor,
Come, come with the lion-gait!
Come and translate thought into deed,
Come, come, whose will is equal to desire;
Come, come, take up the Herculean task
Of forging the unity of our land,

A few days before this New Year Day, in the third week of the previous month to be exact[1], India had rung out the Old and rung in the New in the administration of the country. It is our fervent hope that this day brings to every one a happier and more prosperous New Year.

The twelve months in the Tamil reckoning begin with Chitrai and end with Panguni. The correspodding names in the Mesham series and the Chaitra series of the Saka era are given in a tabular form in on appendix.

Other New Year Days

The first of January began the New Year of the British administration. This was according to the *Julian* Calendar (after Julius Caesar) also called the *Gregorian* Calendar (after Pope Gregory). The Tamil New Year day began at some point in the day according to an astronomical calculation; here however the day is calculated from morning sunrise to the next sunrise. But the day of the Julian Calendar commences always at 12 midnight and ends with the next midnight.

Tamilnad had been generally adopting the *Saka* era from about the latter half of the first millennium of the Christian era. This can be seen from many Tamil literary references and also from some inscriptional evidences. This era takes after the ruler Satavahana of Ujjain. Maharashtra follows the *Saka* era.

The India Government has been adopting this era from 1957, and this is now known as the *National* calendar. The first month here is as usual *Chitra* (corresponding to Tamil *Chitrai)* but the first day commences on March 22 (March 21 in a leap year). 22nd March 1978 corresponds to the first day of 1900 in the National calendar.

The *Vikrama* era of Gujarat starts with the *Dipavali* celebration (in the month of *Karttik* there). It starts with B.C. 57. The *dipavali* in 1978 will commence their 2035th year. This era is called the *Samvat.*

---

1 This was in March 1977.

The *Vishu* of Kerala, their new year day, always coincides with the Tamil New Year's Day; rarely it occurs a day earlier. Their year is known as *Kollam* and according to their tradition it was a day when their ruler Seraman Perumal ascended to the heavens. This era began in 825 A.D. and today the *Kollam* year is 1153. The *Vishu Kainittam* is a practice in Kerala where the haves make presents to the havenots and the practice, like mercy in Shakespeare, 'blesseth him that giveth and him that receiveth'. *Kainittam* simply means extension of the (holding) hand. The practice seems to have been there in Tamilnad in the name of *Tiruk-kai-valakkam* evidenced by many poems of the same name. The name is still perpetuated in some monasteries like Dharmapuram, where the cash gift presented by the Head Pontiff on the New Year's Day is still called *tiruk-kai-valakkam.*

The New Year day in the Telugu and the Kannada areas is called the *Yugadi*, the beginning of the Yugas and it occurs in March, a month earlier than the Tamil New Year's Day. These two areas follow the lunar month system and the duration of their months differs from the Julian and the Tamil Calendars.

The *Fasli* Year starts in 591 A.D. Akbar introduced it in India in 1555 A.D. It is concerned with agricultural cultivation and revenue collection and commences on the first of July. The year of the Parsis however starts with the vernal equinox in March (22nd or 21st). They call it the *navroz*, the New Day.

CHITRA POURNAMI

Occurrence

Chitra pournami is the second important festival of Tamilnad occuring in the month of *Chitrai*. It is a day dedicated to Chitra-putra, the Accountant of Yama the god of Death in the Tamil month of Chitrai (April-May). It is celebrated on the full moon day *(pournami)* of the month when the asterism Chitra (virginis) holds sway. This *Chitra pournami* festival has great antiquity.

Significance

Hindu tradition says that Chitra-putra maintains a ledger for all the good deeds and the bad deeds of human beings and that when on the final reckoning day, the soul is taken before Yama, this accountant reads out the evil deeds as well as the good deeds done by the person on earth and Yama metes out to the soul punishment or reward accordingly.

The concept of Chitraputra (also called *Chitragupta)* stems from the doctrine of *karma* in Hindu philosophy. The good or the evil done by man follows him after death It is the cause of his subsequent birth and in that birth makes him enjoy the effect thereof. This concept is common to all the Indian systems of philosophy alike, not only the Hindu (Saiva and Vaishnava) but also the Jain and Buddhist systems. It may not be very difficult to believe such a doctrine. We hear the voice of a man long after his physical death, preserved through the gramphone and the radio where his voice is recorded and reproduced at will. This is possible because of the advancement of the physical sciences. When speaking of *karma*, we go into the psychic plane, far beyond the realm of matter. On the same analogy it may not be difficult to conceive of the effects of the acts of a human being surviving him in a subtle form and attaching themselves to him through a divine agency when he takes birth later. Chitraputra here serves as a transformer station, if we may say so, to attach the good and the bad to the new birth. He is the cosmic book-keeper.

The worship of Chitraputra naturally pleases him and he is supposed to let off his worshippers with a light or no punishment. Yama is known as *Dharmaraja*, the Dispenser of Absolute Justice. But the importance of Chitraputra has come to eclipse even the greatness of his master.

Observance

The worship of Chitraputra has naturally become most important. As usual with the other celebrations in the homes, like *Sankaranti*, this is also done in the open courtyard under

the direct sun Chitraputra is invoked as usual on a pinch (or handful) of ground turmeric paste or sandal, or even cowdung, placed on a pedestal, usually a new brick on which a *kolam* is drawn. A place about five feet square is decorated in front with *kolam* and five plantain leaves are spread thereon for the food offering. The usual *kuttuvilakku* is lit and Chitraputra is worshipped with flowers and with a simple plain rice offering, with coconuts, plantain fruits and betels.

Special Features

Two items are important. A small palm leaf, made to the size of a scroll from a palm leaf manuscript book, with a steel stylus is placed in front. These are symbolic of the supposition that Chitraputra pleased with the worship and food offering writes on the scroll a good account of the worshipper on the credit side of his ledger. Chitraputra is supposed to appear here and record that this family has earned merit by the proper worship of himself and so does not deserve any punishment. The palm leaf and the stylus correspond to the modern paper and pencil. In the Cholanad area the custom even today is for the young boy of the house to sit near the lamp as the last ritual of the puja and read a few lines from the Chitraputran ballad.

While offering the food, the worshipper says: "I am offering you some of the bounteous produce of this season-mango in bunches and coconut, palmyrah and date palm and the like in clusters, besides the hands of plantains". A few poetic lines are chanted to this effect.

The *navadhanya* (the characteristic nine cereals) are placed on a new winnow and the palm scroll and stylus are placed in their midst.

These two items, *nava dhanya* and the fruit bunches, symbolize the worshipper's eagerness to propitiate Chitraputra with the best of the season's agricultural produce. The food offerings spread on the five leaves are as usual distributed to the workmen and dependents, at the end of the *puja*.

Chitragupta vrata is also a penance undergone by many people in general on this day. They fast from the previous day till the worship is over on the full moon day. A metal image in gold or silver has been prescribed. Sesame made into balls with treacle, rice, ghee and milk is offered to him. A gift of a bronze cup filled with *payasam* is also made at the end of the *puja*. A diet, free of salt, is also prescribed for the day for the devotee. When the *vrata* is first begun, Chitragupta is invoked on five or nine *kumbhas* (pots), one for him and the other for the tutelary deities of the four or eight quarters of the globe[1].

The Chitra nadi of Kutralam which cascades into so many falls there takes its name from this legend. It first began to trace its course down the hill on the *Chitra pournami* day and hence its name, the river Chitra.

The bronze image of Chitraputra in Kanchipuram and some other shrines has a palm scroll and a stylus, the insignia of his office, on his two hands. Rajaraja the Great Emperor has made many endowments for feeding brahmins and yogis on this festive day. Chitraputran features in several folk-tales like the Madanakama rajan kathai.

Legends

The story of Chitraputra is a very ancient legend. Chitraputran means ' the child born out of the picture'. Lord Siva once painted a handsome picture of a boy, who came alive at His bidding. He was given the duty of recording the good and the evil deeds of man. Two other ancient legends are interwoven into the Chitraputran legend at this stage - they are the Ahalya story and the Markkandeya story. In the Ahalya story, when Ahalya learnt how Indra tried treacherously to seduce her, she cursed him that he should go without a child. Thereupon the

---

[1] A homa is made and at the end of the puja which culminates the vrata, the water in the several pots is used to anoint the observer of the vrata. Usually women observe this vrata. Along with Chitragupta, Indra is also invoked on a metal image and his propitiation is done with the fragrant *damana* (artemesia indica) ; Indra through his control of the rains controls the prosperity of the agricultural people.

story goes on to say that Indra did great penance at Madurai and prayed for a child. Pleased with his penance, Siva told him that, although he could not have a child because of Ahalya's curse, He would give him a heifer for a child which in the ripeness of time would beget a human child, which would be worshipped by all human beings. Accordingly he was given a heifer which grew up to be a beautiful cow. Chitraputra was bid to be born as this cow's child in human form.

At about the same time, Yama was kicked to death for daring to snatch the soul of Markkandeya who was an ardent worshipper of Siva, at the end of his pre - destined life of sixteen years. On Yama's death, all death on earth stopped and the earth was over-populated with human beings and others, because children and young ones were being born uncessingly but no one died So in order to maintain the balance of population on earth, Yama was restored to life to continue his function of bringing about death to all beings on the expiry of their allotted span of life, and Chitraputra was installed as his accountant, to ensure that no such mistakes were committed by Yama in the future.

Madurai has importance in the Chitraputran story not only because of the Ahalya episode but also because of another story. Indra once slighted his Deva guru (preceptor) and incurred his serious displeasure. The *guru* asked him to go and worship at all the Siva shrines. Going a round of all the shrines, Indra felt that all his sins were washed away at Madurai. So here he built a shrine for Siva and is supposed to be going over to the place to witness the annual *Tirukkalyanam* (wedding) festival of Lord Sundaresvara (Siva) with Sakti Minakshi. The day of his annual worship is *Chitra pournami*. On this day, Lord Vishnu enshrined as Alagar in the Alagar koil, twelve miles from Madurai, goes all the distance to Madurai to hand over the bride Sakti Minakshi to Lord Sundaresa, as Vishnu is the brother of Sakti.

Literature

The celebration of Chitra pournami is mentioned in *Silappadhikaram* (Chitra-puranai) and we learn that a festival of

twenty eight days was conducted from that day, in the ancient past. If the day happens to be a Saturday (or even Thursday or Sunday) it is doubly auspicious. It is remarkable that Chitraputran is mentioned in the Vaishnava canon by Periyalvar: 'When He is willing to take us into His protection', says he, 'what fear need we have? The writing of Chitragupta has been erased and the seal of Yama the god of Death has been broken; his messengers have all fled'. Niramba alahiya desikar, a Saiva pontiff of the 16th century, mentions that it is a sin not to worship Chitragupta on the Chitra pournami day.

This story of Chitraputra is told in about 2000 lines in a ballad named *Chitraputran kathai*. There are many versions of the story and of the ballad.

Amaravati kathai is another ballad on the same theme. In about 600 lines it narrates the story of Amaravati a very pious lady who does many humanitarian deeds on earth but does not worship Chitraputra. This brings on her the ire of Chitraputra. A unique feature in her life is that even while she was being tortured for her failure to worship Chitraputra, she could not help being kind to the suffering people. She happens to see the suffering of a motherless child crying: immediately she takes him up in her arms washes his face, wipes off his tears and then, with many expressions of kindness, sends him on his way. These two ballads are definitely intended to glorify Chitraputra and extol his worship.

Chitrai (star) in the month of Chitrai is the natal star of Madura kavi alvar, a poet of the Vaishnava canon.

2. VAIKASI

VAIKASI VISAKAM

The Tamil people in general have been throughout a race of rural people. All their life, their culture and civilization and their festivities had centred round their villages. Even when great emperors built large empires and large cities like Tanjavur and Gangaikonda Cholapuram, royalty and the regal pomp had not obliterated the rural complexion of the people's lives. The establishment of a panchayat raj by the Chola emperors itself indicates how village minded the great monarchs were.

Agriculture was the main stay of the people from time immemorial. The months of *Vaikasi* and *Ani* (May-June and June-July) were hot months in Tamilnadu. All rivers went dry and no agricultural operations could normally be done during these months. This then was the season for them generally to have their wedding celebrations and similar social gatherings. Weddings were great social events in the past; many families got together on the pretext of attending a wedding. New alliances were arranged and entire rural societies attended and dispersed in great joy.

Generally this period was free of other festivities - social or religious. People were all left free to celebrate their own family gatherings without the need to attend to any external social functions. Yet the month of Vaikasi had an important festival and that is the *Visakam* festival. As is well known, the asterism *visakam* is considered to be the natal star of Lord Subrahmanya. He is called the Visaka. This festival occurs on the day when the asterism *visaka* (libra) reigns during this month. Subrahmanya's shrines throughout the country have elaborate celebrations on this day. Important places are Tiruccendur, Swamimalai, Palani and Tirut-Tani.

Muruha (*Subrahmanya*) is also called Karttikeya. This is the name (*Karttik*) by which he is known throughout north India. This name is in honour of his having been reared by the six celestial nymphs of the star Krittika in the celestial tank *Saravanap-poyhai* soon after his birth there in the form of six divine sparks from Siva.

Usually this Visaka occurs on the full moon day of the month. In some years it may occur a day earlier than the *pournami* day or a day later.

A secondary importance to this day is due to Dharmaraja. He is the ruler of the southern quarter. Dharmaraja is the god of Death, Yama Dharma, and worship done on this day specially in his honour naturally pleases him. and the souls who go to him after death are treated a little leniently by him. It may be remembered that the previous *pournami* (in the Tamil month of *Chitrai*) was held sacred to *Chitra putra*, the accountant of Yama Dharmaraja.

The Tamil people were not mere blind worshippers of gods and celestials in a superstitious manner. They had always an eye on public welfare and social good. To them, whatever deed was done for the amelioration of the suffering of beings was always service to God. The *Vaikasi* month was a hot and very dry month and so religious injunctions laid down that man should water plants and trees like the basil (*tulasi*) and the pipal tree (*arasu, asvatta*). The basil is a plant whose leaves are a favourite of Vishnu. The *asvatta* is a vedic tree celebrated in the Vedas and the Upanishads and even today held in high reverence throughout India. Its very name in Tamil, *arasu*, the king of trees, is significant. Among the trees Krishna says, he is the *asvatta*. Watering these two is merely symbolic. Basil represents the temqle flower garden and the *asvatta* represents trees in general, public avenue trees, huge trees which give a resting place and a cool shade not only to man but to multitudes of animals and birds. What a great fore-thought of our forefathers, when we compare the ruthless manner in which huge trees are felled down thoughtlessly everyday around us everywhere!

On this day people are asked to make presentations of umbrellas, fans and sandals to scholars and enlightened people. The benefactions we are told are of great religious merit. Even if we may not understand this, we do understand that these are public good. Women are asked to distribute *nir-mor* (diluted and flavoured butter-milk) and *tayir sadam* (modern *bagala bath*, rice mixed with curds) to the hungry and the needy, travelling along the road. They were told that this would confer children on the doer. No family planning in those days and no question of cost or money! This food and drink offering was also to be made without any distinction of caste.

The distribution of rice-curd balls to the deserving and the needy is described as the *Sirusotru vizha* (picnic feast) in the Sangham literature of two thousand years ago.

Though this Visaka is special to Muruha, it is considered equally important to Siva and Vishnu in several places. Siva, in the shrine of Tirumalapadi on the northern bank of the Kaveri in the Tiruchirappalli district performed His dance with a battle axe in His hand on this day. Varadaraja of Hastigiri (Kanchipuram) gives a darsan this day to his devotees, mounted on his favourite Garuda.

An integration of Saivism and Vaishnavism is also sought to be effected by the *Visaka* festival. This day is the birthday of Nammalvar, the alvar who wrote the *Tiruvaymoli*, the Tamil Veda.

Besides, this is an important festival in Simhachala, sacred to the Narasimha Avatar of Vishnu. Narasimha here is always kept plastered in sandal paste so that his ferociousness on the killing of Hiranya may be cooled down. On this particular day, this paste is removed and the bhaktas there can have a *darsana* of Narasimhamurti, without the sandal covering. This is similar to the removal of the sandal paste on the entire form of Nataraja at Tiru-uttara kosa mangai once a year on the *ardra* day.

AKSHAYA TRUTHIYAI

This is a little known festival celebrated on the third day of the bright fortnight in the month of *Vaikasi* It is not of great importance in Tamilnad except that special *aradanas* are done in the temples and *prasadams* distributed to the devotees. *Annadana* or the free feeding of the poor people has been prescribed for this day. Feast is given to the high class people, while large scale poor feeding is done to appease the hunger of the poor people.

In other regions such as Maharashtra and Orissa, it is a festival day, the festival lasting for twenty one days. The first sowing of paddy, known in Tamil as *vidai muhurtam* commences on this day. Presentation to brahmins follows. Fruits, sandal paste and fans are distributed. Roadside water sheds are erected and travellers are given *nir-mor* (diluted butter milk) spiced with lime, salt, coriander leaves etc. *Akshaya* means unending, and right minded people take steps to earn *unending punnya* (merit) on this day.

In Karnataka, where the month is the lunar month, this festival extends for one month from the third of *Chitrai* to the third of *Vaikasi*. It is considered to be a period of rest and relaxation for the Sakti after her slaying of the demons Sumbha and Nisumbha. Sakti is invoked on a *kalasa* of water which is kept on a swing for the month and the usual *puja* is offered to the *kalasa*. This *puja* culminates on the third of Vaisaka which is celebrated with great feasting as an auspicious day.

It is an important day for the Jains. Rishabha deva after a fast of six months got his first drink of sugar cane juice from the King of Hastinapura on this day and in all the Jain temples, an *abhisheka* in sugar cane juice is made to Rishabha deva. The Jains do acts of charity on this day to earn *akshaya punnya*.

The day is held specially sacred in some parts of the country. Coming in the hottest part of the year, it is devoted to

gifts of water pots and fruits which are considered to propitiate the souls of departed ancestors.

An elaborate puja is conducted in the usual manner in all the Siva temples and food offering in the shape of several varieties of prepared rice, *chitrannam*, *vadai* and *sundal* (boiled pulses) are offered to the murtis. At the end of the puja these are distributed to the people.

This day is considered also to be Parasurama Jayanti. Parasurama is the sixth *avatar* of Vishnu and so it is a sacred day for Vishnu puja. It is specially important if it occurs on a Wednesday, in conjunction with the *Rohini nakshatra*. It is also considered the annual day of the birth of the *Krta yuga*.

3. ANI

ANI-TIRUMANJANAM

This is an important day in the Tamil month of Ani, occurring on the day when the star *uttiram* is in the ascendant. *Tirumanjanam* is bathing (*abhisheka*), and on this day Lord Nataraja is given an elaborate ceremonial bath. This is peculiar to Chidambaram, the shrine of Lord Nataraja and is copied in all the other Siva temples.

The Ani Tirumanjanam is as elaborate as the Marhal *Tiruvadirai* festival, which is the *Ardra darsanam* festival. It is the most famous festival of Nataraja. Now also, an equally elaborate ten day festival is conducted in Chidambaram with a car festival and Nataraja's dance etc. Details of the celebration are the same as in the Ardra festival, in the month of Marhali under which head it has been described in detail, later.

Lord Nataraja does not have a daily bath (*abhisheka*) as the Siva linga has. Only six baths in the year are prescribed for Him. Only these two, the Ani Tirumanjanam and the Marhali Tiruvadirai are celebrated elaborately, and not the others. These two occur at an interval of about six months.

THE MANGO FESTIVAL

The Mango Fruit

Fruits and flowers are the basis of the Indian culture. Fruits and flowers occur prominently in all the stages in our festivals. No festival can be celebrated without the two. The banana is considered 'the poor man's fruit. The pongal season is the banana season and pongal immediately conjures up before our minds bunches and bunches of the banana and stacks and stacks of the sugar cane. There can be no ritual of any kind anywhere in the home or in the temple without the ever present banana. Every domestic celebration begins with the banana. *Palum palamum* - milk and the banana fruit - are

the items offered to the bride or the bridegroom who enters the father-in-law's house for the first time. They are indispensable articles for welcoming an honoured guest.

Now, we may remember that Tamilnad has three of the most delicious fruits in the world - the banana, the mango and the jack. These are celebrated as the *Mukkani*, the three fruits par excellence in Tamil legend and literature.

The full moon day in Ani (Anip-pournami) is a day of special festivals in many temples, the chief feature being the food offering of *mukkani*, the three varieties of fruits, to the deity. The festival itself is called the *Mukkani vizha*. It is celebrated in both the Saiva and the Vaishnava temples, such as Tiruvaiyaru and Nagerkoil.

These are all tropical fruits and are available in a large number of varieties in the South of India. There are innumerable varieties of the banana in Tamilnad and, although other countries have taken up the cultivation of this fruit on a commercial scale and have come to occupy the first ranks in the export to world markets, the Tamilnad has still an important position in the matter of cultivation and consumption in the local markets and in the matter of the varieties of the fruit. The *Pongal* season is the peak period of banana production and the chief exports are from the railway stations lying between Kumbakonam and Mayuram. The jack is a relatively rarer fruit, exported chiefly from the Panrutti area, and again here Kerala may take the first posititon as the producer of the jack. Similarly, Andhra may compete with Tamilnad for rank in the production of the hybrid varieties of the mango.

The Festival

But in regard to a popular *festival* in respect of a fruit, the mango takes precedence over the others and probably Tamilnad is the only area which has such a festival. We are told that California in the U.S.A. is the greatest producer of orange and that they hold a festival of oranges and select a Miss Orange and celebrate the season with rejoicing and pomp. The Americans, with a history of a short period in the background, are a nation fond of publicity and advertisement and naturally

their orange festival has come to be known in many parts of the world.

Now let us look at the mango festival of Tamilnad. This is a religio-literary festival celebrated for more than fourteen centuries (1400 years) as against the orange festival which can go back at best only by a period of one century (100 years). The origin of the mango festival is a fine and poignant legend, relating to the story of Karaikkal Ammai, the Saiva woman saint of Tamilnad, whose story is sung in 66 beautiful lyrical verses by Saint Sekkilar in his *Periya puranam* in the 12th century. The story is briefly as follows.

The Legend

Punitavati was the daughter of a merchant of Karaikkal (a former French enclave within the Tanjavur district and now part of Pondicherry state), married in due time to Paramadatta, an young man coming of another rich merchant family of the place. She came of a family of devout, followers of Siva and Paramadatta's family was also similar. One day, visitors met Paramadatta who was in his business office, and presented him with two mango fruits. He sent them home to his wife. A few moments later a hungry Saiva mendicant came to their house. Punitavati, bred up in the traditions of true Saivism, viz., that the feeding of the Siva *bhaktas* is the first duty of every Saiva, immediately prepared to give him food. She had cooked rice, but not the side dishes. It is the rule in the Saiva households that, along with rice, some side dish should be served. So now the young lady served him rice and in the place of a side dish, placed on the plate of the mendicant one of the mango fruits sent by her husband. The mendicant ate the food served with the fruit and went away satisfied, blessing her.

Then she prepared the other items of food and when later Paramadatta came in for lunch, she served him the full meal as usual and gave him also the remaining mango fruit. He ate his food and also the fruit and quite unnaturally asked her for the other fruit also. She went into the store, thoughtlessly, as though to get the fruit. But it had already been given away by her. She now remembered this and in this

predicament she prayed to Lord Siva to help her, and lo! there was a luscious fruit in her hands lifted up in prayer.

Quickly she took it to her husband. He ate it, found it to be tastier than the other one, and asked her how she got such a delicious fruit which was not the one he gave her. The whole incident seems to be a sport of Siva, calculated to reveal to the world the deep devotion of the young Punitavati and to cause her to sing devotional songs to enrich the language. She, who had never known an untruth, now told him the whole truth. But Paramadatta could not understand it. 'If that be so', he said, 'get me another through the grace of Siva'. She was naturally horrified at his request, but unless she produced another, her words were not likely to be believed. In great anguish, she prayed again. There was again in her hands another fruit, but when she gave it to him and he touched it, it vanished. It was now the poor fellow's turn to get terribly shaken. He believed she was an angel from the heavens and, considering himself unfit to live with her, he planned to leave her. In a few days, he put out to sea for trade purposes in a routine manner, earned much wealth overseas, returned and settled later at distant Madurai. In time he married again and there had a female baby which he named Punitavati, in honour of his first wife at Karaikkal.

The story goes on that when she was taken to him, he fell before her saying that she was a celestial. Not caring to live with the body which was wedded to him, she gave up the body and by the Grace of Sive, went to Kailas and then went to Tiru Alangadu at the bidding of Siva, where she is believed to be eternally watching the Dance of Siva in everlasting bliss.

Tiru Alangadu is a famous Siva shrine near Madras. Of the five sabhas, or Dance Halls of Nataraja, this is the Ratna Sabha, the Hall of Gems. She has sung there three marvellous lyrical poems in 143 verses, expressing her joy at witnessing the Dance of Siva and on her spiritual experience. Her songs have been collected into the Eleventh Book of the Saiva Canon and she is also classed as one of the 63 Saiva saints. Her own

natural name has been forgotten and she is just hailed as the Mother Saint of Karaikkal, Karaikkal Ammai.

Ammai lived probably in the 5th century A.D. and from that period, a great festival for the mango fruit is conducted in a temple constructed at Karaikkal in her honour, in the month of Ani. This year (1978) the festival is celebrated between June 17 and 20.

On the festival day, a bronze image of Karaikkal Ammai is taken round the immediate four streets around the temple in procession, for the worship of the residents there. People, men and women in the houses, verandahs, top floors, terraces and balconies rejoice on the occasion with throwing thousands of mango fruits on the devotees who accompany the image in the procession. These catch the fruits joyously. Thus this is indeed a living festival of mangoes.

The next day also, an image of Karaikkal Ammai is taken round, but this image is one featuring Karaikkal Ammai as a ghost, in which form she witnessed the Dance of Nataraja at Tiru Alankadu, after she had given up her physical body at Madurai. Even today there are mountains and mountains of mango fruits in the area during the season.

The Songs

Karaikkal Ammaiyar in her songs expresses the most profound and eternal *advaita* philosophy while at the same time giving forth a supreme ecstasy of realising the Absolute of that philosophy within her own heart. This expression of the immanence and the transcendence of God in the same breath is said to be one chief characteristics of Indian mysticism. The following verses of Ammaiyar will tell us that she was one of the first exponents of that mysticism.

He is the Knower, the One
That causes the Knowledge, and
He is the Knowledge that knows.
He is the Truth that is known.
And He is all this, the Sun, the Earth,
The Heavens and all things besides.

Let them say He is in the Heavens,
Let them say He is the Lord of the Heavens.
But I proclaim that He,
the one Supreme Consciousness—
The One whose throat is dark,
with swallowing the poison –
I proclaim— He abides in my heart.

That day, when I became Your servant,
I did not know Your form.
Nor do I know it now. But,
What shall I say to those who ask
What is Your Lord's form?
Tell me, What is Your form ?

4. ADI

DAKSHINAYANA

According to Hindu astronomy the sun is supposed to move from the Tropic of Cancer in the north to the Tropic of Capricorn in the south, by the first of *Adi* (about the 15th of July) and back from Capricorn to Cancer on the first of Thai (about the 14th of January), the two passages together making one full year. The southward passage is called the *Dakshinayana* and the northward passage is called *Uttarayana*. The two days commencing the two ayanas or passages are held to be sacred, and water and oblations *(tarppana)* are made to the manes on the days. The days are called *punnyakala*, days of great merit.

According to modern scientific astronomy, it is the earth that moves round the sun and the sun does not move round the earth. The apparent movement of the sun from the north to the south and from the south to the north is caused by the tilt in the axis of the earth while in motion. The passage is called an ayana and each covers a period of six months. The two positions are respectively known as the northern solstice and the southern solstice. These are considered to occur respectively by the 21st of June and 22nd of December according to modern reckoning, and are also called the summer solstice and the winter solstice. The sun is considered to be farthest from the equator on these days, and to pause before retracing the path. We in Tamilnad are situated north of the equator and the climatic changes of summer and winter are caused by these movements of the sun.

The Indian tradition is to hold the Uttarayana day as meritorious because on this day the sun turns north, and cold and winter begin to change. The Dakshinayana symbolizes the day when summer begins to change into winter and so it is not so very welcome. Yet for purpose

of remembering the ancestors both are qually important and a sea bath, river bath or bath in a sacred tank is enjoined for the day.

ADIP-PERUKKU OR ADORATION TO THE RIVER

Introduction

It is well known that all the great civilizations of the world, past and present, have been river-based civilizations. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Roman the Aryan and the Dravidian civilizations flourished on the banks of rivers. The Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris, the Tiber the Ganges, and the Vaihai and the Kaveri had the reputation of having given birth to the evolution of great cultures. Students of English literature know the famous lines of Macaulay in his *Lays of Ancient Rome* uttered by the great warrior, Horatius, who fought, along with a trusted band of a few men, for time for the demolition of the Roman bridge on the River Tiber, so that the invading enemy might be halted on the opposite bank and could not have an easy march into Rome. The bridge at last fell, and Horatius, brushed aside the enemy's hands stretched out to capture him, and jumped into the river in full armour, addressing the river thus:

O Tiber, Father Tiber,
To whom all the Romans pray,
A Roman's life, a Roman's arms,
Take thou in charge this day.

Both the armies, the Romans and the invaders, were aghast at the courage and valour shown by Horatius. It warms the heart of every reader even today to learn that Horatius reached the Roman bank safe and the enemy was ultimately beaten off.

The Romans called the river *Father*, but we in India call our rivers Ganga and Kaveri, *Mother*. To call the river, the giver of all bounty to the children of the soil, as the

mother is in keeping with the Indian culture. Ganga is held in such veneration throughout the country that any river or stream or fountain or tank, is always Ganga. The great rivers celebrated in literature and religion, in lore and legend, in Tamilnadu are the Vaihai on whose banks stood the city of Madurai which housed the ancient Tamil Academy 2000 years ago, and the Kaveri whose deltaic wealth has been feeding the entire Tamil country for thousands of years. We reserve Vaihai for a future occasion and shall speak only of the Kaveri now.

Occurrence

The *Adip-perukku* is a great folk festival concerned with the river Kaveri. It is celebrated on the particular day, the 18th of *Adi* and is not associated with any star or phase of the moon (*nakshatra* or *tithi*). It is not mentioned in any *purana*. But it is the most popular one and perhaps is equalled only by the *pongal* festivel. The *Adi festival* is a worship and a *welcoming* felicitation to the waters that begin to flow in and start the cultivation season ; the *Pongal* festival is a *thanks offering* to the Sun god who had made all the cultivation possible and had given the people a bounteous harvest. The first follows the *Dakshlnayana* day while the second is actually on the *Uttarayana* day.

Significance

In the rural communities of a few decades ago and perhaps even today, *Adip-perukku* is a day of great fun to the newly weds. The *tirumangalya* is generally tied in a piece of yellow string round the neck of the bride by the bridegroom. The actual wedding would have taken place in the month of Vaikasi or Ani. So the Adi 18th is utilised by the bride's people to invite the bridegroom to their place in order that he may replace the cotton thread with a golden chain. The month of Adi is not considered auspicious for conception for the newly wedded bride because in that case child birth may be in Chitrai, a very hot month, which every one would like to avoid, and so during the whole month, she is detained in her mother's house. On this day however, he is invited here and the two go together to the river along with the other people of the village and of

their own household and there, he transfers the *tirumangalya* to the gold chain and consigns the old thread to the Kaveri.

A sumptuous *chitrannam* with more than half a dozen varieties are prepared in the house and, on return from the river, all the people have a feast which is a welcome change from the routine.

For people in the lower levels of society also, this is a day of great enjoyment. Apart from the riverside resort, they have a separate worship of *Mari* and similar inferior tutelary deities, which is called *pallayam podutal* - a worship with lots of food offerings.

The poet's benediction and the actual cultivation apart, we find the people of the land most grateful to the Kaveri. The south-west monsoon starts in the Coorg hills and Mercara by early July and by the middle af Adi, i.e., the first of August, the river is in full spate[1]. The Kaveri has a hundred branches in the delta, and all the branches of the river carry the fresh floods. In every large village and town along the whole length of the river, steps had been built into the river to allow people to go into the river and have their bath. These steps are traditionally 18; the rivers are also in full spate on the 18th of the Tamil month of Adi (the 2nd or 3rd of August) and reach up to the top of the 18 steps and this is celebrated by all the farmers and the agricultural people as the *Adip-perukku* (Adi floods); it is also known as the 18th day floods. This is a great celebration in which the entire community of whole villages and towns all along the length of the Kaveri river and its branches join in whole families. This is a grand day of thanksgiving to the great River Mother. It is impossible to capture the feeling of joy, elation and gratitude engendered by the ancient river unless one is born a citizen of the river area.

All men, women and children, of all classes and castes, take part in it.

---

1. All this refers to the conditions before the days of the Mysore dams by which the Karnataka Government seeks to stop or reduce water supply in the Kaveri prior to the south west mansoon season in the delta area.

Observance

By about 7-8 a.m. all people set out for the river at an auspicious moment. Whole communties and whole villages turn out. All of course go for a bath in the river. Everyone takes a change of clothing with him or her. With men it is an occasion for swimming contests. Women start to the river with a more serious purpose. They carry raw rice, jaggery (or molasses) and sugar, coconut and plantain fruits, red coloured *olai* (palmyrah leaf done as an ear ornament), special black bangles, thread, lamps, flowers and sandal, turmeric, camphor and other puja materials. *Olai* is the name of the ear-ring even today. Girl children of course accompany their elders.

Boys have great mirth-making on this day. They prepare a small toy cart in wood with four wheels, something on the model of a temple car. They decorate it with tender white coconut leaf shoots done into ornamental designs interspersed with green mango leaves. Multi-coloured tissue paper is also used in the modern day for decoration. The construction of the car gives scope for their creative and artistic activity. Groups of boys draw several such chariots from their houses to the water front of the river which may be a furlong away or in some cases even a mile away. The rice pots and other offerings like flowers are placed in the toy cart and the boys draw them to the water front.

As soon as everyone is assembled, all of them have a bath and then there is the *puja*. Kaveri, as the representative of the great Mother, the giver of all bounty, is invoked on a handful of sand placed on a decorated pedestal kept facing east, lamps are lit, (it is a great feat to light the lamp and keep it burning till the end of the puja, because of the strong winds blowing on the open water front) and the rice soaked in water is mixed with sugar and coconut chips and some pulses and is offered as food offering along with the plantain fruits. The cotton thread is soaked in turmeric and sandal paste and placed on the invoked Kaveri. Simultaneously, the floral archana is made to the running water, the real Kaveri; the *olai* and bangles (called *kadolai-karuhamani*) are placed in the

stream in token of Kaveri's wearing them, a piece of the thread is also offered, the rice also offered and lighted camphor waved. Then girl children play several games of *kummi* to their hearts' content in front of the real Kaveri, on the sands or on the bank of the river. Boys also play games like chadugudu, modern kabaddi, on the banks. Pieces of the thread are the worn round the neck by all the *sumangilis* and little girls, and by all the boys and men round the wrist. The treacle-mixed rice is then distributed to all present and then they return home to partake of the sumptuous *chitranna* lunch.

Literature

Silappadhikaram, the first epic in the Tamil language has a few beautiful lyrical verses in praise of Kaveri, of which the following is one;

Bees hum sweetly on either side
Gem-like flowers wrap you like a skirt ;
You walk gently, O Kaveri,
Casting about your black eyes.
Casting about your black eyes,
and with your gentle gait, O Kaveri,
You have caused the rule of your Lord
To be just and bounteous, I see.

The suggestion is that the flow of the Kaveri is slow, enabling all its waters to be diverted for the irrigation of the Chola country, thereby making it prosperous, so that people are happy and law-abiding ; therefore there were no crimes in the land and so the ruler did not have to punish any one and his rule was a benevolent one.

There is a large Tamil purana of over 1500 verses singing the glory of the Kaveri. It is called the *Brahma vaivartha puranam* (18th century). Almost all the puranas glorifying the larger shrines of the Kaveri delta, such as Mayuram, Kudantai, Idaimarudu, Kuttalam etc. sing the glory of the Kaveri in several chapters.

Legends

We may note in passing that the Kaveri is the only river of the South which is included as a sacred river in the mantra chanted by all people on the occasion of a ceremonial bath any where :

Gange cha Yamune chaiva
Godavari Sarasvati
Narmada Sindhu Kaveri
Jalesmin sannidhim kuru.

The Kaveri is as old as the Tamil language. We have the legend that Kaveri was being brought up as the daughter of the royal sage Kabera and hence the name Kaveri. She has entered the *kamandala* (hand pot) of Sage Agastya and at the prayers of the people Ganesa took the form of a crow and tilted the pot, on which the water flowed out from it into a stream which came to be called by her name as Kaveri. The Kaveri flowed through the Chola country making paddy fields yield abundantly and verdant woods bloom in profusion and hence her name Ka-viri. She is hailed as the patron saint and the queen of the Chola monarchs. All Tamil poetry from the earliest period celebrate her glory. Many *puranas* exist in Sanskrit and in Tamil which sing her glory and state the merit accruing from a bath in her holy waters. There are scores of large towns and cities on its banks and all of them have annual festivals, which culminate in the glorification and worship of the river.

One particular benediction uttered by the Sangham poets is note worthy : "Your land is blessed. Even though the showers fail, the Kaveri never fails to feed her children, the people of Cholanad, with her thousand hands". The thousand hands are the thousand branches and streams through which Kaveri distributes her waters and irrigates the delta consisting of the entire Tanjavur district and some taluks of Tiruchirappalli and South Arcot districts. The Kaveri is in a sense perennial : Coleroon the widest of her branches (which is a mile wide in some places), carries her flood waters to the sea at the monsoon time, and

carries a moderate stream of crystal clear water flowing from the springs in her bed even during the severest summer. It is as though she is never tired of feeding her children. The Sangham poetry says shat she is feeding her children just as the cow feeds milk to its new born calf.

We may remember now the famous Grand Anicut by Karikala Chola II some 2000 years ago across the Kaveri-Coleroon to divert the flood waters of the Kaveri into the Coleroon (*Kol-idam*, the stream for the reception of this water) and ultimately to the sea. The anicut has been a marvel of irrigational planning and engineering during all these centuries.

Let the poet continue: "My Lord king, may your land fed by the Kaveri yield at the rate of 1000 *kalams* of paddy per *veli*". This benediction aims at an ideal yield and like all ideals was perhaps rarely attained in the past. A *veli* means 6 2/3 acres of wet land ; a kalam means 24 Madras measures of paddy. This in effect meant a yield of 75 bags of paddy, 900 lbs. of paddy per acre. This was not after all so very unattainable ; in recent years many farmers with improved seeds, appliances, methods and fertilizers had even transcended this target by double cropping.

A Novelty

Kumbhakonam is in a sense the cultural centre for the Kaveri delta from Tiruchirappalli in the west to Kaverippatinam on the sea coast. A new festival has recently been evolved here to celebrate and worship the Kaveri on the *last Friday of Adi* (about the middle of August). Thousands of women go to the river for a bath in the Kaveri in the early morning and return. This was known as the city *pongal* more than 60 years ago, but somehow had been abandoned later. This is renewed and celebrated now again for the last 30 years. On the river front each of the families has a *kuttuvilakku* in the afternoon and the river is worshipped with seven large pots (brass *kudam*) of milk. Sakti Kaveri is invoked with mantras and a regular puja with many *abhishekha* materials such as honey, sandal, lime, coconut, sugarcane juice, curds, ghee and oil is performed with

the accompaniment of mantras and the *nagasvaram* orchestra. A *pongal* cooked at home is brought to the river and is offered to Kaveri after pouring in the several pots of milk. Young unmarried girls vie with one another for carrying the milk pots and pouring them into the river, as the belief is that one who carries the pot will get her marriage settled immediately. Elephants are part of the entourage to the river front in the morning and in the afternoon.

THE ADIP-PURAM FESTIVAL

The Tamil month of Adi (July-August) ushers in the cultivation season. The rivers begin to carry fresh floods and there is intense activity everywhere. The supreme mother, Parasakti as Parvati the daughter of Himavan, is considered to have descended on the earth on the day when the asterism *Puram (Delta Leonis)*, eleventh in the order of the 27 *nakshatras*, is in the ascendency. Worship of God as the Supreme Mother has been there in India from time immemorial and particularly in Tamil nad, among all the different sects. Where this day falls on a Friday, it is specially sacred to Sakti.

The Concept of Sakti

Worship of the Supreme Mother Sakti does not appear to be very ancient; it is not found in the Rig Veda, although we have there mention of the consorts of Indra and Varuna. A classical reference is the one in the *Kenopanishad* where She appears before the bewildered Indra: *Striyam ajagama Bahu sobhamanam Umam Haimavatim* - the wondrously beautiful Uma, daughter of Himavan. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* for the first time introduces the concept of Sakti as the Principle of the Energy of the Supreme Being. Later *puranas* and *itihasas* have built on this concept. The concepts of the status and function of Sakti vary in the different religious sects.

Tamilnad has thousands of Siva temples and each temple has a Sakti shrine. Along with other *utsava murtis* there, a special bronze icon of Sakti known as *Adip-pura amman* is installed even in all small temples. A festival is conducted

on this day in the temple. If funds permit, the deity is taken round in procession along the four main streets; otherwise it is taken round in the inner *prakara* (corridor) at least, with the temple orchestra music.

After going round the main streets, Ambal goes to the temple tank (sacred *tirtta* or *pushkarani*) for a *tirttavari*. The entire village assembles at the temple tank at the proper moment, when a representative symbolic image of Ambal is dipped in the waters of the tank. This is the *tirttavari*. Simultaneously all the assembled persons have a bath in the tank. On behalf of the temple a presentation of all the items which constitute a *sumangali*-hood, such as new sari and blouse, comb and mirror, *kumkum*, sandal and flowers with coconut, betels and fruits are presented to a *sumangali* brahmin woman.

The customary nine pulses are wetted in water the previous evening and now at the place of the *tirttavari*, the sprouted pulses (particularly the green gram) are distributed to all those present as the *prasadam* of Sakti. This festival is usually conducted in the morning.

Whoever is not grateful to the Mother? This being the Divine Mother, naturally the celebration is attended with great pomp. In the modern day, where there are elaborate celebrations for any kind of birthday for any one, it may not be difficult to understand the birthday celebration of the Mother of all creation by a grateful and pious following.

Integration of Siva and Vishnu

The day is of special significance to both the Saivas and the Vaishnavas. Orthodox Vaishnavas, who may not worship Siva, freely offer worship to Sakti (Ambal) in a Siva temple, as in their view, Sakti is the sister of their Supreme Being Vishnu and so is not different from him.

An important festival is held on this day in Sankarankoil in the Tirunelveli district. Uma, known as Gomati ammai in this place, desired to have a vision of Siva and Vishnu toge-

ther and performed a *tapas* therefor. Both of them appeared before Her together in the form since known as *Sankara-Narayana*. This is being celebrated in that place as an important festival, called Adi-tapas. This symbolizes the intergration of the Saiva and the Vaishnava sects ; the *alvars* and the *nayanmars* have both sung on this combined or integrated form.

Adip-puram is of still greater importance to the Vaishnavas because it is the birthday of Andal, the lady saint among the twelve Alvars. She was born on this day through the grace of Bhumip-piratti, Mother Earth, on the soil which Periyalvar was digging for planting the basil plant, *tulasi*, the favourite of Vishnu. She was named Kodai (Sanskritized as Goda). Her story is well known. She chose Lord Ranganatha as her bridegroom and after a few years on earth in which she sang the famous *Tirup-pavai* and *Nachiyar Tirumoli* songs, she attained union with Sri Ranganatha at Srirangam. The glory of Vaishnavism is the glory of Andal's *Tiruppavai*.

There are other Puram festivals which are not so universal. In Kerala the Trichurpuram festival occurs in *Chitrai*, where to the local Siva temple Bhagavati and Krishna from two different temples in the neighbourhood arrive and there is a grand festival. A colourful array of elephants is an important feature along with local dances. *Aippasi-Puram* is again a festival for Sakti in Chidambaram.

VARA LAKSHMI VRATA
OR LOVE OF CLEANLINESS

Occurrence

Lakshmi in Hindu mythology is the Goddess of all wealth and prosperity. She is the consort of Vishnu, the preserver of all things created. The term Vishnu itself means, pervading everywhere Lakshmi is the Energy of Vishnu pervading everything. The special worship of Lakshmi is known as *Vara Lakshmi vrata* ; it occurs on the last Friday of the bright fortnight of the Tamil month of *Adi* (corresponding to the lunar

month *Ashada - Sravana)*. This vrata is generally observed by the smartha and the madhva brahmin families.

Significance

Mahalakshmi has eight aspects Sri (prosperity), Bhu (landed property), Sarasvati (learning), prithi (love), kirtti (fame), santi (peace), tushti (pleasure) and pushti (strength). On this account Vishnu himself is known as the Ashta-Lakshmi-pati, the Lord of the Eightfold Lakshmi. Of the eight, Varalakshmi has control of the last five aspects (Vara-Lakshmi, the giver of all boons to the devotee). In Karnataka she is known as Vara Mahalakshmi. So people offer Her worship in order that they may have material prosperity and happiness. This day is particularly considered as the celebration of cleanliness in honour of Lakshmi. 'Cleanliness is next to godliness' says the proverb. In our society, a clean place is considered the abode of Lakshmi and whenever there is an accumulation of dirt, the elders of the house would say, 'here his dirt, Lakshmi will not step in'. Naturally the whole house is cleaned and where necessary freshly white-washed.

The Form of Worship

The *vrata* and *puja* of Lakshmi are always done by *sumangalis* (women who are married and whose husbands are alive, also called *suvasini)*. On the previous day (Thursday) they have an oil bath. The worship is offered in the evening, at the hour when cows, raising the dust of the road, return home after grazing, called the *go-tuli lagna*. (In some places it is done at dawn.) Lakshmi is invoked in a *kumbha*, a pot of water in which lime fruit and a few coins are dropped in, and covered in the usual manner with mango leaves and a coconut smeared with turmeric and sandal. Cotton thread is wound round the pot, which is generally of copper and, where one can have it, of silver also. The kalasam is placed close to the wall, and the head of Lakshmi is painted at the base of the wall, in kumkum and turmeric.

On the frontal side of the *kumbha*, the bust of Varalakshmi is drawn, with *kumkum*, turmeric and sandal: she is given a

crown, a *tilaka*, and locks of hair falling down from under the crown. She is conceived of as milk-white in colour (not the traditional red hue of Lakshmi) dressed in white, seated on a lotus, holding a lotus on her right hand. As Sarasvati is one of the aspects of Lakshmi (as the patron deity of learning also) this form will be akin to the Sarasvati form who will have on her hand a book and the *spatika mala*, in the place of the present lotus. Cotton threads soaked in sandal and turmeric are placed across the *kumbha*. Nine knots are placed on the cotton thread and Lakshmi is considered to dwell on the knots. As Lakshmi is the goddess of all wealth, women are fond of decorating the kalasa with all the costly jewels and trinkets they possess. They also offer a red coloured piece of cloth as *vastra* for her. Vara Lakshmi is invoked with the *Sri Sukta* and with the Lakshmi gayatri mantras.

A floral pandal is created at the place of the puja along with *toranas*, so that it is a sort of special mandapam. Lakshmi is then invited into the house. The kalasa on which she is invoked is placed on a plate of brass or silver and it is taken from the front porch of the house into the place of the puja inside by the ladies of the house ; all the time they are singing songs on Lakshmi. This is the invitation and welcome to Lakshmi. The *kumbha* is as usual placed on a decorated pedestal facing east, on rice liberally spread on a plantain leaf ; the place in front is cleaned and decorated with *kolam* etc , and two kuttuvilakku (lamps) are lit and placed on either side. Food offerings with coconut and plantain fruits are spread on plantain leaves and the puja offered.

The necklace and other jewels of the ladies are placed on this kalasa-Lakshmi.

The special floral offering for worship today is the *aruhu* grass (*durva* in Sanskrit, *cynodon dactylon*) in the place of flowers. *Aruhu* is also a great favourite of Siva and Ganesa. It is proverbially the strongest in the matter of survival, under the most adverse conditions ; naturally it is considered to please Lakshmi and confer on the worshipper prosperity even under the most trying circumstances. The screw pine (*tazhai*, *pandanus*

odoratissimus), jasmine, oleander, red lotus and the sweet smelling *marukkolundu* and *davanam* are also offered. No specific food offering has been specified : the usual *pongal (ven pongal*) and the other favourites may be offered. The ceremonial water offering made to the deity *(arghya*) is here made, not with water, but with milk. On this day, the ladies have only one meal during the whole day and the night.

In some areas it is the custom to invite an elderly sumangali on this occasion as the representative of Lakshmi and present her with rice, fruits, jaggery, coconut, bangles, comb and mirror, turmeric and sandal etc.

When the *puja* is over, the turmeric-smeared thread is taken out and worn round the neck by all *sumangali* women and unmarried girl children, and tied as an amulet on the right wrist by men. It is considered a talisman conferring long life on the husband and securing suitable bridegrooms for the unmarried girls in the proper time. On the next day (Saturday) the women folk visit one another, sing songs of praise before Lakshmi, and receive *tambulam* and flowers in the other houses. This ends the worship.

The Legends

Many legends are associated with the *Varalakshmi vrata*. At the beginning of time, Siva and Parvati were engaged in a game of chess, with one Chitranemi as the umpire. This poor fellow always favoured Siva, and although Parvati won every game, he declared in favour of Siva. Enraged, Parvati cursed him for his unfairness that he would become a leper. He then prayed for Her mercy and Siva also interceded on his behalf. Then She declared that the observance of the *Varalakshmi vrata* would cure him. Accordingly he observed the *vrata* and performed the puja and was cured.

There is also another meaningful legend relating to the origin of the vrata. In Kundinapuram lived a pious lady named Sarmati who adored children. Long before child care and child psychology were evolved as sciences to be taught

in the school curriculum, she had known them and practised them in the bringing up of her children. Lakshmi appeared before her in a dream and expressed satisfaction at the lady's care of children. Sarmati thereupon began the worship of Lakshmi in *kumbha* the next day and in due course received the grace of Lakshmi in full. Neighbouring women heard of her dream and they also did the worship. Thus began the Varalakshmi vrata (Lakshmi the giver of boons).

Literature

Two significant facts emerge from the legends. One is that for the welfare of the nation, children should be loved and cared for, and two, that elaborate puja is not important, even a blade of grass will do if there is love and devotion in the heart. Sage Agastya worshipped Lakshmi and had his desires fulfilled. His words of praise on Lakshmi, called *Lakshmi stotra* are contained in the *Kasi khanda*. Tottikkalai Subrahmanya swami had sung a decad of verses in praise of Lakshmi worshipped at Tirukkannamangai in Tanjavur district. Lakshmi is considered to have worshipped Siva in many shrines of which the most famous is Tiru Arur in the same district. Lakshmi, called Tirumahal, is worshipped in all the Siva temples and there is a subtemple for Her at the north-western corner. Here she is generally flanked by two elephants with lifted trunks offering flowers and is known as Gajalakshmi.

VYASA PUJA

This is not exactly a festival but merely a puja observed mostly by brahmin *sannyasis* in honour of the great sage Vyasa. This is on the *pournami* (full moon) day of the Tamil month of Adi(July-August). The full moon days of the four months of Vaisaka, Adi, Karttikai and Masi are generally considered Vyasa pournima days. The *sannyasa asrama* (stage in life) is the last of the four stages- *bramacarya*, *grahasta*, *vanaprasta* and *sanyasa*. The sannyasi has no wife, no children, no kith and kin. He has renounced everything - family ties and all possessions - to devote himself to the larger family of the whole

world, irrespective of class, caste or creed or even clime. He is naturally held in the greatest esteem in the whole of India.

The *sannyasi* wears the saffron coloured robe ; occasionally, a man dressed even in white may be a sannyasi. The sannyasi order is held to be the highest order : he discards even the sacred thread (the *poonool*) the moment he enters the holy orders; he is above caste.

Vyasa, also known as Vedavyasa, is the greatest sage for the Hindus. He is considered the codifier or compiler of the Vedas. He is also considered the author of the great *itihasa* (epic), the Mahabharata, running to more than a hundred thousand verses. He is also the author of the Eighteen *Puranas* : if not the writer of the *puranas*, the original narrator of the Eighteen.

He is worshipped in the usual manner on a piece of new cloth over which rice is spread and on which lime fruits are placed. After the puja, the disciples take the rice home and mix it with their rice stock, making the entire stock holy and blessed. This is considered to confer on them all material benefits including sound knowledge and learning. The Vyasa puja is performed rigorously in all the Sankara mutts, as the first Sankara, the Adi Sankaracharya of Kaladi, is considered to be an *avatar* (incarnation) of Vyasa.

Vyasa is represented in sculpture in many temples. He is portrayed as pointing to the ONE with his raised forefinger.

Vyasa as Badarayana is considered to have collected the thoughts of the Upanishads in the aphorisms known as the *Brahma sutras*. They are one of the three basic Hindu scriptures or sources of philosophy, the other two being the *Upanishads* (parts of the Vedas) and the *Gita*. (Badarayana because he lived in the *badarikasrama - badari - ilandai, the jujube tree* - considered to be even one *avatar* of the power of Narayana)

This day is also known as the *Guru purnima* : *guru* - the spiritual preceptor. The greatest veneration is enjoined for the

acharya, both in Saivism and in Vaishnavism. *Acharya devo bhava* says the *Taittiriya Upanishad.*

The *Chaturmasya* vrata of the sannyasis commences with this puja. They are usually prohibited from staying in the same place for more than one night. But during the rainy season, because of the difficulty of going from one place to another, they are permitted to stay in one place for the full period of the rainy season i.e. four months from *Adi pournami* which was then considered to usher in the rains.

RAKSHA BANDHANAM

Occurrence

This is a festival of North India made known to the South also by the stories of Tagore and Sarat Chandra. This is celebrated on the full moon day of the month of Adi (*Sravana*). It is also known as *Raksha pournami.*

Raksha bandhanam originated from the Rajputs who are considered the most chivalrous people in India and their glory is celebrated in history and song and legend. There have also been recently films on the raksha bandhanam. The festival, to those who celebrate it, is the most fascinating, tender and touching. It makes all women, sisters and brings out the finest feelings of chivalry in man. The slender string evokes such a bond of close relationship which is prepared for any sacrifice.

Significance

Raksha is protection and here this consists of the custom of tying a string dyed yellow in turmeric on the wrist of a brother by his sister on this occasion. It signifies that she is praying for his welfare and that he for his part is determined to give protection to this sister. Any one tying the band becomes a sister and so entitled to that loving protection and care. This was considered to be a brahmin festival.

The *raksha* is something corresponding to the *tayattu* in the Tamil language, some kind of *talisman.* In the north, the

raksha is manufaetured in cvery small town and the hawkers have a brisk trade in this season. But the orthodox and more sentimental people do not purchase it outside, but spin the yarn and prepare the cord in their houses just as orthodox people prepare themselves their sacred thread (*poonool*) for the *Avani avittam* ceremony The plain thread is the red *raksha* but there are many types of sophisticated *rakshas* with designs, and made also in silver and gold.

Probably during the periods of the many Muhammedan invasions in North India and even of the Muhammedan rule in Delhi and other places, women were always in danger. Women who had no father or no brother to protect them or no other near relative, sought the brotherly love and protection even from non-relatives in this manner. Naturally chivalrous men went to the help of such lonely women and this sacred appeal for protection had come to occupy through the ages the role of an important ritual among people torn by religious feuds and persecution.

Observance

Originally it is said to have been tied by a brahmin, but in course of time it came to be tied by the brother, thus becoming a family ritual. The tying of the *raksha* is there in domestic affairs in different forms. The *raksha* is also the *kappu nan* or *kankanam* in Tamil nad on the occasion of a wedding. When the temple priest ties on his own forearm a *kappu* for conducting the temple festival for ten (or eleven) days. he cannot go out of the village during the period. It is a *vrata* or vow, and he becomes free only after eompleting it. Not only he, but all the members of the village take it as their own *vrata* not to go out of the village if they happen to *be present* on the day of the *kappu* or initiation of the festival ceremonies.

The spirit of the *raksha bandhan*, though not this ritual, exists even today in the south. During the wedding ceremony, particularly at the time of tying *tirumangalya*, a sister of the bridegroom stands behind the couple holding a lighted lamp on a plate, to signify her prayers for the welfare of the couple. Out of gratitude for this goodwill, the young man sends annua

presents to her on the occasions of *dipavali* and *pongal.* No doubt her father sends the presents to his daughter. But whether the father is alive or not, it has been the acknowledged duty of the brother to send the annual presents so long as either of them is alive. The *pongal* presents are particularly important. Besides fruits, sugarcane, jaggery balls etc., a cup of ghee and a wick plaited in cotton yarn are important and these signify that the brother is lighting the home of his sister for ever and ever. It is also a matter of pride for the sister to receive the ghee wick from the house of her birth on the occasion of *pongal.*

The *raksha* in the name of *kappu* is there in the life of the Hindus at different levels with different emphasis. On the seventh month of the first pregnancy of an young woman, a *kappu* function is conducted in her parents' house. All people felicitate her on her pregnancy; new bangles, glass and gold, are placed on her arms. A special *raksha* is tied round her right wrist invoking the gods to protect her in the remaining advanced months of her pregnancy and grant her a safe delivery. The function has several names of which *valaiyal kappu,* is significant here (*valaiyal* - bangle, *kappu* - protection). Innumerable varieties of dishes are prepared for her sake. The idea is that in the next few months, she has to be on a special diet on account of her advancing pregnancy and this is the last occasion, and a ceremonial one at that, when she may be safely permitted to eat any delicacy to her heart's content.

Another such *kappu* function on the 16th day (or 21st day in some communities, and even on the 11th day) of a child's birth. The new born baby and its mother are till now kept in isolation and this function is intended to remove that isolation All the gods are invoked and they are asked to protect the baby from any harm thereafter. A special bangle. of twisted silver and copper wires does the function of the *raksha* string and the bangles are placed on the *child's* wrists and ankles. In some houses. this is the cradle ceremony, where the child is placed in the cradle on this day. An elderly lady coming of a prosperous family, having many children and grand children, is asked to lift the child, place it in the cradle and rock it. Many lullaby songs are sung on the occasion. This function is also called *tottil - idutal,* placing the child in the crib.

Periyalvar has composed many verses on the *kappu* for the child Krishna and for the ritual of placing him on the crib and singing him away to sleep. *Talelo* is the refrain used in such songs:

Made out of gems, and
Set with diamonds-
A handsome crib in fine gold,
Lovingly has Brahma sent you,
Sleep, Thou of little feet, - talelo,
Sleep, Thou who measured the worlds - talelo.

Special Features

The *kappu* again comes into prominence in the marriage functions. The marriage ceremony was in the past spread over many days and the bride and the bridegroom could not go out of the village for any purpose till the ceremonies are complete. The bride's father (or the priest) ties the *raksha* on the wrist of the bridegroom (sometimes even his own father) and he in turn ties it on the wrist of the bride.

Originally probably the priest tied it on the hand of the person concerned, with prayers for his welfare and protection from evil. But somehow through the ages it came to be a ceromony done by his sister. In the extremely troubled condition of North India over a long period due to the Muhammedan invasion, any young lady or woman who was in trouble tied it round the wrist of a chivalrous man seeking his protection and he gallantly came to her succour at the moment of need. Needless to say this induced a brotherly feeling among all people including strangers.

Legends

A legend says that Krishna advised Yudhistira to observe this *raksha bandan* in order that he might have the protection of the devas and told him a story of the devas. In the endless battle between the devas and the asuras, Indra suffered frequent defeats. He asked his guru Brhaspati for guidance. On the

full moon day of the month of *Sravana*, Indrani and Brhaspati tied a *raksha* band round the right wrist of Indra. He sallied forth, defeated the *asuras* and again became master of the three worlds. From that day the *raksha bandhan* came into prominence as a talisman to protect the wearer from evil. In Madhya pradesh, artisans and craftsmen tie the *raksha* round their tools, like the chisel, on this day to signify their attachment to their avocation in life.

Raksha bandhanam is the first major temple ritual which inducts scores of Sivacharyas into the Kumbhabhisheka of a temple.

Raksha Bandhanam is also celebrated by the Jains in Tamilnad, those of the Digambara sect. The day is the same. It is said that Bali, King of Hastinapuram, had once organised a sacrifice of Jain monks on the day. A Jain sage by name Vishnukumara rescued them from the sacrifice by his spiritual powers. In memory of that rescue, the Jains today worship the sage first on this day and tie the protective *raksha* or band to each other. The significance is that the Jains have vowed to protect each other on this day and protect their monasteries, monks and temples etc. from all harm from any quarter. As the jains do not attach any great virtue to woman, the *raksha* for protection of a woman does not arise among them.

Pillai-Tamil is a song of praise in 100 verses in ten sections, sung on a favourite deity or patron. Its first section is called *kappu-p-paruvam*, the section on *raksha*, where all gods and minor deities are invited to come to the protection or *raksha* of the child-deity or child-patron.

A garland, how frail of design,
Our spirits to clasp and entwine,
In devotion unstained and unbroken,
How slender a circle and sign
Of secret, deep pledges unspoken.

—*Sarojini Devi*

5. AVANI

VINAYAKA CHATURTHI

Introduction

Legends and festivals are the flesh and blood in the anatomy of the culture of any nation. The *Vinayaka Chaturthi* is part of such flesh and blood in the great culture that is India.

This is one of the great national festivals of India. It is celebrated with considerable rejoicing throughout the country. To the people of Tamilnad it is a great day indeed. But in Maharashtra it is a greater national festival; it is there called *Ganesh Chaturthi* and is performed with great splendour and gorgeous processions. There are many festivals and *vratas* in honour of Ganesa, but Ganesa chaturthi is the greatest annual festival.

Ganesa (Vinayaka) is the most popular deity in the whole of South India. Even the smallest hamlet has a temple for him. The moment a new township is formed, immediately the residents put up a small temple for Vinayaka and call it *Pillaiyar koil*; *Pillai* here means the son of Siva; he is the Elder Son and so is known in literature as the *Mootha-pillaiyar*; Subrahmanya (called also as Muruha in the South and Karttik in the North) is the Younger Son.

Vinayaka means one who has no superior; Ganesa and also Ganapati mean the leader of Siva's forces: these terms refer to the same god, the elephant-headed son of Siva. These are *puranic* thoughts no doubt; but in the philosophical conception, Ganesa is just one of the twentyfive forms (*Sivamurttas*) in which Siva, the formless and unmanifest Being, manifested Himself to the devas and the mortals on earth. He is worshipped as Vignesvara, the Lord who helps mortals and celestials to overcome all obstacles in their lives and efforts.

We shall say here a few words regarding Ganesa and then about the puja of Ganesa.

The Ganesa Cult

Ganesa is not mentioned in the Vedas. Some have sought to equate Brahaspati, lord of prayer, also called Brahmanaspati, (not the celestial guru Brahaspati but a god in the Vedas) with Ganesa, but there is no basis for this. Yet there is a short *upanishad* of a later day in his name, the *Ganapati upanishad.* It speaks of the glory of Ganapati and the benefits that accrue to one who worships him and meditates on him at day break and at sunset as the Supreme Being. It mentions some songs of prayer, the form of Ganesa to contemplate upon, and the Ganesa gayatri mantra:

Om Eka dantaya Vidmahe
Vakra tundaya dhimahi
Tanno dantih prachodayat.

There is also a *Ganesa gita* which is a dialogue between King Varenya and Ganesa. This is a treatise on *Yoga.* Ganesa here tells the king that yoga is the realisation of the fundamental unity underlying the apparent diversities of the world of experience and consists in apprehending the identity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara with Ganesa, who is the Ultimate Reality. He is also known to the *Grihya sutras.*

Latterly, the worship of Ganesa developed into a separate cult and it was known as the *Ganapatya,* one of the so-called *Shanmatas.* Esoteric meanings were also attributed to the name Ganapati; He is the *pati* or Lord of the *Sivaganas* (Siva's forces); *ga* stands for thought and word, and *na* is the state which transcends them; He is the Lord of this state. Again, *ga* is knowledge and *na* is liberation; He is the Lord of knowledge and of mukti.

Any act in Tamilnadu by any community or class of people, any celebration or family ritual, starts with a prayer to Vinayaka. So also in all later literature. There is no book which opens without an invocation to Vinayaka.

The form of Ganesa

The most important concept about Ganapati and one which takes him spiritually far above the legends and *puranas* is the identification of his form with *Pranava* the primordial sound *Om*. The Vedas and the Upanishads speak profusely about this concept, and the physical form of Ganapati is just a *pictorial* representation of the form of that *sound.* Not only his whole form, but the elephant head in particular symbolizes *Pranava.* The elephant is the mightiest and biggest of the animals known. Hence the elephant's head was given to Ganesa, who was visualized as the greatest power. The elephant is noted for its sagacity. Hence it may seem appropriate that Ganesa, thegiver of *Jnana*, has been worshipped with the elephant head.

His four arms stand for his immense power in helping humanity. The noose and the goad borne on two of his hands stand for his all-pervasiveness and grace. The broken tusk held in the right hand shows that he is the refuge for all. His huge belly is indicative of his tolerance and also signifies that all things, the entire Universe, are contained in him. His feet stand for the bestowal of *siddhi* and *buddhi*, attainment of desires and knowledge. The modaka (sweet pudding) in his hand is symbolic of *jnana* conferring bliss. His mount, the shrew, represents the wordly desires which are to be overcome.

Ganesa is usually installed at the entrance to the central *sanctum*, at the south, and also at the south western corner in the first court, of every Siva temple. Besides, he is placed on the first eastern goshta (niche) on the outer southern wall of the *ardha mantapa* in the dancing pose known as *Narttana Ganapati* in many temples. The tip of his trunk will curve to the left and touch the *modaka* generally held in a left hand. In a few rare cases, the trunk will curve to the right to touch the modaka on a right hand. Here he is called *Valampuri Vinayaka* (valampuri - right turned).

Ucchishta Ganapati is a rare form found in a few temples like the Nagesvara temple at Kumbakonam. It does not belong to the Saiva marga but belongs to the Saktimarga, and even there

to the *vama* sect (*ucchishtam* means refuse). This Ganapati is considered to have great potency in the granting of boons and is worshipped by the smarthas; the Saivas as a rule d not worship him.

There is a form of Ganapati in Tiru Chenkattamkudi in Tanjavur district known as *Vatapi Ganapati;* this image is said to have been brought from Vatapi, capital of the Western Chalukyas in the 7th century A. D. by the commander of Narasimha Pallava I, after vanquishing the Chalukya forces. Here a gain there is apeculiar Ganapati with a human face, called *Naramukha* Ganapati.

The *Vatapi* expedition was in 642 A.D. Some have contended that the worship of Ganapati was intrduced in Tamil nad only after the victorious. commander brought back an image of Ganapati from Vatapi and installed it in his place at Tiruchengattamkudi. This is not correct. An earlier song of St. Appar by about 610-615 a. d. speaks of Ganapati, and a verse in *Purananuru* (about the First century A. D.) is interpreted as referring to Ganapathi worship. (This has been disrcussed at length by the author elaborately in a separate pape- elsewhere.)

The names of Ganesa are significant. Each emphasizes a particular aspect of the physical form and its significance. For example, the name Vakra-tunda means the bent trunk (nose) and it signifies that he is the remover of all illusion (maya). Many different forms of Ganapati such as Maha Ganapati, Yoga Ganapati etc are worshipped in different places.

The Worship

The Ganesa puja is done on the fourth day, chaturthi, in the bright fortnight of, the Tamil month of Avani (August-September). The worship or *puja* is done as usual towards the close of the forenoon. The whole house and the entrance are decorated with *kolam*. Festoons are hung round the place of worship making it into a sort of decorated *mandapam* or hall. Tender coconut leaves, split and artistically designed, white in colour, mango leaves dark green, and lilies in white, pink

and crimson festoons, present a colourful appearance. The newly made clay image is placed facing east in a convenient place in the northern part of the house, on a pedestal decorated in *kolam* with an eight petalled *padma* (lotus flower). On the *padma*, a small quantity of paddy or rice is spread and the Ganesa image is placed on it, over a plantain leaf. Only white flowers are used for the worship. *Aruhu* and *erukku* are special favourites. Then all the puja rituals are gone through fully.

Besides, the fruits of the season such as the wood apple (*vila*) and *jambu* (*naval*) are also offered in plenty along with the customary plantain fruits and coconuts. Naturally such profusion of eatables whets the appetite of the boys who utilise all their creative and artistic talents in making the Ganesa image. After the pujas are over the boys are given a sumptuous feast of these articles in the noon, in the evening and in the night also. Usually in the rural parts, a *puja* is performed again the next morning or noon *(punar-puja)* with fresh food offerings; in the evening the Ganesa image is carried by the boys along with the flowers and consigned to a running stream and, where it is not available, to a good water pool or tank. So Ganesa who was shaped out of the earth is now returned to the same earth.

The worship of Ganesa on this day is supposed to confer advancement in learning to the young student and success in any enterprise undertaken. All castes are eligible to perform this puja. Usually *vratas* and *pujas* are prescribed only for *sumangilis*; widows are excluded. But this puja may be done even by widows; it will ward off widowhood in future births.

Ganesa worship has been prescribed specially for all the *chaturthis*, that is the fourth day, both of the waxing moon and of the waning moon (the bright and the dark fortnights); and also for the *sashti* (sixth day of the bright fortnight of the month of *Margali* - December-January). But that on the *chaturthi* of the bright fortnight of Avani (August - September) is the most widely celebrated one and it is a grand annual festival.

The very manner of invocation (*avahana*) of Ganesa for *puja* anywhere is symbolic of the deepest Hindu philosophy.

He is given a complete image and invoked thereon during the Vinayaka *chaturthi puja*. But in the matter of the many other occasions of worship, he is invoked on any material - a pinch of sand, of sandal, of turmeric, or even of cowdung: the material does not matter. The whole conception of Vinayaka is in the mind of the worshipper. He brings out the idea of God (Vinayaka) from within his heart and makes Him abide in the material before him for the duration of the puja.

The counterpart of Ganesa in Vaishnavism is Vishvaksena, who is deemed to be the head of the forces of Vishnu. He is called *Senai mudalihal* in Tamil, which means the same. Although puranas and rituals mention him, he is not mentioned in the *Nalayira prabandham*. Just as a prayer to Vigneswara is an indispensable first feature in all Saiva rituals, either in the home or in the temple, a prayer to Vishvaksena is insisted upon for all Vaishnava rituals. An aspect of Vishvaksena was born as Nammalvar, according to the *guruparampara* legends. But Ganesa is never considered to be born as anyone on earth.

In Karnataka, young people make it a ritual of seeing 108 Vinayakas on this occasion, and so they go about visiting their friends' and relatives' houses on this day. The clay images here are prepared months ahead and painted and coloured. They are now installed in public places where worship is conducted for a week to twelve days. Along with musical concerts and religious discourses, an image of Gowri is also installed along with Ganesa and the two images are together immersed in tank or river on the last day.

Lokamanya Balagangadar Tilak brought this festival into national prominence in 1893. He brought round all the people of Maharashtra in the cause of the freedom struggle, in the name of the Ganesa Chaturthi festival. Local festival committees were organised in all important centres to celebrate the festival for ten days. There were musical entertainments each evening after Ganesa puja and lectures on the greatness of Ganesa, which were actually a propaganda among the people exorting them to unite under a common flag for the noble cause of the liberation of India. The immersion of the Ganesa idols in the

sea on the last day followed, with the accompaniment of band music and so on. Tilak had conceived of this festival as a measure or a national symbol to unite his people for a political cause and history pays a glorious tribute to his success in this regard in the pre-Gandhian era. The festival which is yet a household festival in Tamilnad, has been evolved as a public national festival in Maharashtra.

There is a belief that people should not look at the moon on this day, due to a curse on the Moon (Chandran) when he happened to cast an evil eye on Ganesa.

Creative Activity for Children

The form of Ganesa is a delight not only to the artist and the sculptor but also to the children. The Ganesa chaturthi is one of the festivals which give scope for the creative talent of the rural folk to express itself. When almost all the other deities are invoked on a *kumbha* (or pot of water), on a pinch of sandal, turmeric or sand, and on other similar materials, tradition requires that we make Ganesa in full form in clay on the day of the celebration. Almost all the children try their hand at producing the complete form of Ganesa in clay with their own hands-the full elephant face with its trunk curved at the tip, four hands, the uplifted one carrying the goad and the noose, the left hand carrying the *modaka*, the right in the pose of offering benediction, the big belly with the sacred thread thrown across the left shoulder, and the two stumpy legs, not omitting His mount the little shrew. The scarlet black-eyed seeds of the creeper *kunrimani* (the crab's eye, *abrus precatorius*) serve as the eyes of Ganesa. In places like Madras, a slender paper umbrella is added. The clay image is made at the moment in the morning. In urban areas, people purchase it. But in the rural parts it is the pride of the urchins to make the image each for his family worship. The boys vie with one another in making the image perfect: i.e., in making it conform to what is known as the *Ravi varma* picture, as closely as possible. Rules lay down that the image is made out of the mud of the ants' hill. In urban areas, hand-made supply cannot cope up with the demand. So, the makers have wooden moulds on which they handpress the kneaded clay and cast the images.

Aruhu and Erukku

In the matter of floral worship, two articles are considered very important to Ganesa. One is the aruhu, grass blade. The tip of the grass shoot is collected in sufficient quantities for floral *archana*. *Aruhu* is the most common grass, a weed in the cultivated gardens. It is the common *hariali* grass (*durva* in Sanskrit and botanically *cynodon dactylon*). It is generally collected for worship with three blades or five blades. Sometimes it is made into a wreath and placed on the shoulders of Ganesa.

The second is the erukku (*calotropis*) flower. *Erukku* is the sign of destruction and devastation. But a verse from the Sangham poetry says the gods will not decline to accept even the most trivial *erukku* (verse 106 of *Purananuru*). *Erukku* fllowers are stringed together and placed round the crown and neck of Ganesa. *Erukku* is also deemed to be a favourite with Siva. The idea would obviously have been that nothing is abhorrent or unwelcome to the gods, since everything is indeed God's creation.

There is an image of Ganesa carved out of the root of the *erukku* plant kept at the entrance to the Tiruvalanchuli temple in the Tanjavur district and worshipped. The *erukku* is a small plant, never more than a shrub. Probably an inspired artist happened to see such a plant growing into a tree with a stocky stump and twisted roots. The imagination of the artist saw the form of Lord Ganesa in the stump and the twisted root. He could not but worship it and so he carved out an image of Ganesa out of its root and placed it there for worship. The image is about a foot in size. No *abhisheka* or flower is offered to it. A brass arch is placed in front of the *murti* and all flowers are offered to it. Only the *pachai - karpuram* (medicated camphor) is dusted on the image with a piece of fine muslin cloth from a distance, periodically. The image is many centuries old.

Legends Relating to Ganesa

Ganesa is a confirmed bachelor. But the *devas*, out of gratitude to him for the slaying of the *asura*, gave him in

marriage two celestial damsels Siddhi and Buddhi (*Siddhi* is attainment of desires and *Buddhi* is intellect.) This is only an allegorical way of saying that Ganesa is the giver of all success and of all knowledge to his devotees. Similarly he is said to have married one Vallabhai, daughter of a sage. *Vallabha* is just power; the elephant is the biggest animal on earth and this only indicates that he is the giver of all prowess to his *bhaktas*.

The legend of Ganesa circumambulating Siva and Sakti for getting a mango fruit from Him is well known. Once in Kailas. Siva was holding in His hand a mango fruit given by sage Narada. Ganesa and Muruha both clamoured for the fruit. Narada had said that the fruit was not to be cut but to be eaten whole. So Siva declared that it would be given to him who went round the earth first. Immediately Muruha mounted his peacock and flew round the earth. But Ganesa, with his great intelligence, simply went round Siva and Parvati thrice and claimed the fruit, saying that, as Siva and Sakti were immanent in all things in the universe, going round them was equivalent to going round the physical universe.

This legend is symbolically adopted in the placement of the deities in the shrine at Tiruvallam, a small place in North Arcot district. Here Ganesa, who is always placed at the *right* of the entrance to the sanctum, is placed on the *left*, to indicate that he has gone round and is waiting for the fruit from the hands of Siva who is inside the sanctum.

There was once an elephant-headed demon who was a terror to the celestials. At their request Siva caused Ganesa to take shape with an elephant head and also caused the demon to be slain by Ganesa. The demon had asked all devas to perform *toppuk-karanam*, a humiliating form of showing obeisance before him. (*Toppuk-karanam* is the act of holding one's ears by the hands and sitting and rising up alternately, rather a difficult form of exercise.) When he was killed by Ganesa, the same form of obeisance came to be shown to Ganesa, to obtain his grace.

Another legend says that Vinayaka was commissioned to write the Mahabharata on the northern Meru hill and, when

his stylus broke in the speed of his writing, he broke his right tusk and continued his writing with the broken piece.

He is also considered to be responsible for the birth of the River Kaveri by tilting the handpot of Sage Agastya, in which Kaveri was contained till then.

An important legend of Tamilnad relates to the discovery of the Devaram songs (the Saiva canon) at the request of Raja Raja, the Chola Emperor (985-1014 A. D.). Nambiyandar Nambi, a boy priest of Tiru Naraiyur, was able to point out that the songs were stored in a chamber adjacent to the Dance hall of Lord Nataraja in Chidambaram, through the guidance of *Polla-Pillaiyar* (the Ganesa who was not carved by a chisel, but was self-revealed). This happened to be a very great event in the history of the Chola empire and also in the history of Saivism in Tamilnad.

There are several other legends which do not redound to the the credit of the inventors of the legends.

Many are the heroes in legend who had benefited by the *Vinayaka chaturthi vrata.* The prince Nala, the husband of Damayanti was in his previous birth king of Gowda desa. Powerful enemies invaded his state and he had to flee for life. Sage Visvamitra taught him the Vinayaka Chaturthi vrata and asked him to pray to Vinayaka. He did this and in time vanquished his foes and regained his kingdom. By virtue of his observance of the *vrata* he was born in the next birth as prince Nala, ruler of the Nishada state. Damayanti observed this vrata and was able to choose Nala for her bridegroom. Sri Krishna did the vrata and obtained the *syamantaka* gem from Jambavan, and also obtained Jambavati as his bride. Indra for the destruction of Vritrasura, Rama while searching for Sita taken away by Ravana, Bhagirata while bringing the Ganga to the earth from her celestial abode, and both the devas and the rakshasas at the time of the churning of the ocean of milk, followed this *chaturthi vrata* for Vinayaka. Yudhishthira observed this and ultimately came out victorious in the Mahabharata war. Since Vinayaka grants the fulfilment of the desires of his devotees, He is called the Vara siddhi Vinayaka.

All the celestial beings are said to have worshipped Vignesvara, the remover of obstacles. Vishnu worshipped him before he subdued Mahabali, Sakti worshipped him before marching on Mahishasura, Adi sesha before holding the earth on his hood, and Rama before commencing the Setubandana and so on.

To illustrate the paramount power of Ganesa not only to remove obstacles, but also to cause obstacles when he is forgotten or ignored, the following story is narrated. Lord Siva started for the slaying of the *asuras* who were flying over all places in three fortresses made of copper, silver and gold, and causing great havoc wherever they landed. Siva forgot to worship Ganesa. So Ganesa caused the axle of the chariot on which Siva was riding towards the asura cities and the chariot would not move. Then Siva remembered Ganesa, performed the worship due to him and only then could his chariot move. This incident is said to have happened at Achu-iru-pakkam (the place where the axle broke) in South Arcot district. This place is sanctified in the hymns of St. Jnanasambandhar. In the famous invocatory verse of *Tiruppuhazh* beginning *Kaittala nirai kani* Arunagirinathar mentions this incident : "My Lord the great warrior who pulverised the axle of the chariot of Siva, who reduced the three cities to ashes".

Another version of the story makes no mention of Ganesa. When Siva marched upon the Tripura city, all the celestials came to help Siva in various forms so that they might have a share in the glory of the destruction of the asuras. The sun and the moon took the form of the two chariot wheels; the Vedas became the horses, the Meru hill became the bow, the serpent Vasuki the bowstring, and so on. As the chariot was rolling along, the devas proudly thought that each one was responsible for the forthcoming victory of Siva over the three Asuras. Siva who is the Indweller in every being (the *Antaryami*) knew this and just pressed the chariot with his toe. The axle broke and with a rattling noise, the chariot sank down. Thus humbling the pride of the devas, He just smiled and the Tiri-pura fortresses and the Asuras were reduced to ashes.

Literature on Ganesa

In Tamilnad in the past, a child newly admitted to school was taught a song in praise of Ganesa (in 35 lines), called *Vela-mukham* (the Elephant face). Each line is a praise of Ganesa ending with *jaya jaya* (victory to Thee).

Literature in praise of Ganesa is vast both in Sanskrit and and in Tamil. *Bhargava purana* is in honour of Ganesa. A large *Vinayaka purana* was written by Kachiyappa munivar by 1780 A D. in Tamil. The worship of Ganesa by the grand old dame of Tamil poetry, Avvaiyar, and the occasion for her singing the famous *Vinayakar ahaval* are well known. Learning that her friends Saints Sundarar and Seraman Perumal were on their way to Kailas, she proceeded to to perform her Ganesa puja in a hurry, so that she might also go with them. But Ganesa asked her to do the puja leisurely as usual and told her that she could reach Kailas along with them. When the puja was over, He lifted her up with His trunk, so the legend says, and placed her in Kailas earlier than they. Her poem is famous throughout Tamilnad and committed to memory by thousands and is always sung at the time of the puja. It enumerates in detail many yogic processes.

Three poems are found in the 11th Book of the Saiva canon in praise of Ganapati. The Saiva hymn singers (7th century) no doubt refer to Ganesa but these poems (10th and 11th centuries) are the first poems on Ganesa.

Sivajnana swami, the famous dialectician of the late 18th century, has written a short *Pillai Tamil* poem on Vinayaka. In our own time, the great national poet Subramanya Bharati, who always made a passionate plea for a national integration in the fields of culture and religion, could not help being lured by Ganesa. He has written a fine lyric of forty verses on Ganesa, known as the *Vinayakar Nanmani malai*. The following is a verse from the poem.

Our duty is to write songs,
To serve the mother land, and

Not to be lazy for a single moment.
Ganesa, the favourite child of Uma,
Will look after us. Therefore, my heart,
Attend to these three duties.

Ganapati hrdaya is a mystic mantra on Ganesa, revealed by the Buddha himself. The spread of the Ganapati cult in countries abroad is said to be partly due also to Buddhism, besides of course to Hinduism.

We may say that the Ganesa worship is the one cult that is uniting all the people of India, particularly of South India. The bleakest of villages may be without a good water source, a good school and many similar things of a civic life, but never without a Pillaiyar koil. Let me conclude with the well known Sanskrit *sloka* in praise of Ganesa :

Yam brahma vedanta vido vadanti
Param pradhanam purusham tathanyaih,
Visvodgateh karanam isvaram va
Tasmai namo Vigna Vinayakaya.

Salutation to Vinayaka, the remover of all obstacles, above whom, the seers learned in the wisdom of the vedanta and of the Brahman say, there is no higher Being, and the Isvara who is the cause for the upliftment of the universe.

NAGA PANCHAMI

Occurrence

The Naga cult is a very primitive cult which is yet followed in the modern day, not only by the lower classes in society but also by the higher classes. The goddess Manasa, something like our Mariyamman, is a Naga goddess in Bengal. It is a vast subject which cannot be dealt with here, but some aspects of it relating to the Naga Panchami festival alone will be noticed.

The festival is observed sometimes on the fourth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Sravana (Avani) and known

as *Naga chaturtti ;* but its celebration on the fifth day as the *Naga panchami* is the most well known one.

Significance

Occasionally some woman is barren and does not beget any children. The belief is that she had incurred *naga dosha,* an act of sin against the *nagas* (or serpents) and so she is enjoined to perform an expiation ceremony of worship and prayer to the nagas. We may remember here that the nagas are not mere serpents but one class of the celestials. Two of the Navagrahas (nine planets) are Rahu and Ketu, Rahu with a human head and serpent body, and Ketu with a five headed serpent head and a human body. So worship of the nagas is also propitiation for the planets.

Observance

Women generally go to a chosen ant hill where the serpent was said to inhabit and perform a puja to it. The serpent is always the *cobra,* a representative of the thousand headed Adisesha. They pour water and milk on the ant hill in token of *abhisheka* and apply to it sandal and *kumkum* and perform a puja with flower, camphor and incense. Milk, (eggs by non-vegetarian people) and balls of sugared sesame, puffed rice and pulses are offered as food offerings. Some are dropped into the holes; milk is placed by some at the hole in coconut shells. After this worship, they all go home. Usually women do this puja in groups. The naga is believed to come out and drink the milk.

Often stone carvings of the Naga are placed in numbers round the *asvatta* and *margosa* trees planted together at the bathing places on tanks or rivers. Usually worship of the nagas is done in these places also and a circumambulation of 108 times is also done.

Some people would decorate the entrance to their houses with pictures of the naga on either side of the wall drawn in turmeric and kumkum.

The ant hill has a hole under ground and into this hole the serpent goes and stays. It is thus called the snakehole, although

it is a hill and hole made by the ants. The earth of the ant hill is considered to have some curative properties and it is used in some forms of medicine, in making clay images of Ganesa for worship on the Ganesa chaturthi day, and for the *yagasala* on temple festival occasions. Nagam is the serpent and people call to the serpent as 'nagappa'. A large number of the rural people will not agree to the killing of a serpent when it gets into their houses but would seek to drive it away with entreaties like 'nagappa, go away'. When the cobra leaves the premises, they would make it a rule to place some milk for it near its hole.

Legends

There are any number of legends associated with the naga worship, chief of them being the Mahabharata story relating to Prince Janamejaya's serpent-sacrifice where he sought to kill all the serpents because one serpent had bitten his father Parikshit to death. One snake Takshaka escaped without the knowledge of any one and in the form of a brahmin married a wife and settled in a distant place. His wife let out the secret and learning it Janamejaya caught Takshaka and put him to death. Takshaka issued a curse that every wife should be killed, out of anger at his own wife's treachery. To make amends for this, it is said that every wife prepares a flour image of herself and offers it as a sacrifice on this day.

Althogh we worship nagas, legends connect many shrines with worship by nagas, such as Tiru Nagesvaram, Pamburam, Nagur, Nagappattinam and the Kumbakonam Nageswara temple. Ant hills as naga holes are said to be worshipped in the Sankaranainar koil temple.

Naga Chaturthi is a grand celebration in all southern states except Tamil Nadu, on the fourth day after Dipavali. This is intended to propitiate the Nagas, serpents, and to pray to them not to harm human beings. People pray:

O serpent, golden serpent,
The large one and the tiny one!
O serpent, of twentytwo carat gold!
We move in the dark and

In the bright moon.
Excuse us even if we step on your head.
Forgive us if we step on your middle,
Forgive us if we step on your tail!
O Serpent, O Nagendra.

The Kalinga Narttana, dance of the child Krishna on the serpent Kalinga who was causing great harm to the cowherds in Gokula is a very familiar Bhagavata purana legend. A picture of Krishna dancing on Kalinga and suppresing him is a favourite one found in almost all homes today. The marking on the hood of the cobra even now is considered to be the impression of the feet of child Krishna.

Childlessness is considered to be the result of an offence to the nagas. So childless people pray to the Nagaraja and perform his worship and vow to have their children named as Nagarajan, Nagammal and so on. Such names prevalent today are due to this kind of prayer.

The serpent is the ornament for Siva. In all Siva temples, there is a silver Nagabharana, a serpent seat-cum-hood for the Sivalinga.

People also believe that many physical ailments such as pus in the ear are cured by prayers to the serpent.

ANANTA VRATA

This is a festival celebrated mostly by the Madhvas on the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight of Avani; also called *Ananta Chaturdasi*. It is in honour of Vishnu as Ananta Padmanabha, and is said to protect the devotee from all evil. Ananta means endless and so endless good will accrue to the observer of the *vrata*. Vishnu reclining on his Ananta sayana (Adisesha couch) is worshipped. A *kalasa* is installed and the usual *puja* is done to it, by men. Cotton threads in fourteen strands are placed on a *chakra mandala* and after the puja, they are taken out and worn as a talisman by the observer of the

vrata. In some places pairs of red silken threads are placed in the puja and then offered to married couples of the family and they wear them on their arms; these are supposed to bring good luck. There is the usual feast after the puja. Ananta is the infinite aspect of God, infinite in time and infinite in space. Ananta Padmanabha enshrined in the temple at Trivandrum symbolizes this aspect of God.

UPAKARMA AND GAYATRI JAPAM

Education has been the prime concern of the great seers of our land in the past They had set apart the Vijaya dasami day in September-October for secular education and set apart another day for spiritual education. The Indian people in the past attached greater importance to matters of the spirit. Among a people who believed that even where the physical body perished, the spirit went on having further births until all its *karma* was wiped out through successive experiences, matters of the spirit continued, and did not end with a single birth. Hence the importance of spiritual education. Education was always associated with the home, be it secular or spiritual. *Gurukula vasa* was also a form of home life where the home of the *guru* was substituted for the home of the parent. Secular education commenced when the boy was five years, while spiritual education commenced at seven years.

The month of Sravana (Avani in Tamil, August-September) was considered most suitable for the commencement of this education, It is quite probable that the months following Avani in Tamilnad were monsoon months when people might not be able to go out and so this period could have been chosen for the novices to sit at home and practice the study of the Vedas and memorize them. Usually all beneficial deeds are associated with *purnima*, the full moon day. During this month, the star *Avittam* (constellation *Aquila*) is in the ascendancy on this day and so it has been known in common parlance as *Avani Avittam*.

On the particular day, the boy and his father are seated in front of a sacrifical fire (*homa agni*) and after the homa, the

boy is invested for the first time with the sacred thread with the chanting of the appropriate mantra. The thread is known generally as *upavita* and *yajnopavita.* It consists of three strands of hand-spun cotton yarn, each of which consists again of three strands of primary yarn. The father or the *guru* or other person having an interest in the boy is expected to gather the cotton and spin the yarn; it is never purchased in the shop The sacred thread is known as *poonool* (thread which is worn (poon-nool) and the ceremony is called a *poonool kalyanam.* Where people can afford, this is celebrated on a lavish scale with feeding of the entire village, as on the occasion of a marriage. It is attended with elaborate instrumental music and elaborate presentations to the *guru.*

A separate kind of cotton used to be grown for this purpose and it is itself called *poonool paruthi.* It was being grown on fences as a small treelike perennial shurb while the ordinary cotton used for cloth weaving was an annual plant. It has usually eight seeds and so was called *ettukkotai paruthi.* This did not require ginning and slivering. The cotton boll is held in the hand and the spinner goes on spinning cotton with a *takli* even while walking. This cotton has long fibres and so a fine yarn is spun out of it.

The sacred thread is worn across the left breast over the left shoulder and under the right arm. As soon as it is put on, usually the boy's father utters the *Gayatri mantra* in the rlght ear of the boy. This utterance is a symbolic instruction in the Veda. The boy from the next day onwards is expected not only to study the Vedas but also to perform a *sandhya vandana,* a worship to the Sun god both at daybreak and at sunset, He has now become a *dvija* (twice born).

The next day is the day of the *Gayatri japa.* The boy is asked from the day of the instructions to utter the *gayatri mantra,* a minimum of 108 times both in the morning and in the evening. It is uttered and counted with rotating a rosary of 108 *rudraksha* beads or *spatika* beads.

Gayatri is one of the three devis Sarasvati, Savitri and Gayatri. A *dhyana sloka* is uttered by the boy; it is of two

kinds, one, meditation on the combined form of the three Devis and two, the meditation on the individual form of each. The *gayatri mantra* is directed towards the Sun who is the manifest form of the Supreme Brahman. He is considered to be the source of eternal light and knowledge, and obeisance is made to him. The significance of the *gayatri mantra* is: "That Savita (Sun god) is to be worshipped by us He illumines our senses; Our knowledge develops through him". The term *gayatri* simply means that which protects the chanter of the mantra. When one meditates on the Sun which is Light, naturally the worshipper hasan internal illumination, in time. *Pranayama* and *Surya namaskara* are other disciplines which go along with this discipline of *japa* (repetition of the name). It is not possible to expatiate on them here.

Through several millennia, there is no gainsaying the fact that the *gayatri mantra* has been really protecting the brahmins who uttered it sincerely and rightly with a full comprehension of the significance. The present unhappy condition of the brahmin community has to be attributed only to its lack of trust and failure in regard to this spiritually uplifting mantra.

The celebration is called *upakarma,* the initiatory ceremony which qualifies boys for starting their spiritual education, or study of the Vedas. It is also called *Upanayana*, the ceremony in which a *guru* draws a boy towards himself, invests him with the sacred thread, and thus endows him with a second or spiritual birth and qualifies him to learn the Vedas by heart. Because of this ceremony the boy becomes a twice-born, a *dvija.* This is done on the eighth year from conception in the mother's womb or the seventh year after birth. In ordinary language, *nayana* is the eye and so *upa-nayana* is taken to mean the opening of the second eye or the eye of spiritual competency.

The duties of a brahmin have been categorically laid down in the Upanishads as the two—*svadhyaya* and *pravachana*—learning and imparting learning. (These are termed *odal* and *oduvittal* in the Tamil language.) He has to study the Vedas and the sastras and teach them to mankind; he was no other

duty in life. The Vedas are not the monopoly of the North; they are as much the property of South India also. We have here such places as Vedaranya (the forest of the Vedas) and Vedagiri (Tiruk-Kalukkunram, the hill of the Vedas) and Vedapuri (the city of the Vedas, Teralundur). The Vedas have been adored by all the canons Saiva and Vaishnava, and also by the secular literature in the Tamil language. The followers of the different Vedas celebrate this day on different days, having their emphasis on the occurrence of the *nakshatra* or the *tithi*.

The Rig vedins consider the asterism *Sravana* or *Tiruvonam* in Avani important; the Yajur vedins consider the *purnima* important; the Sama vedins have the ceremony on the *hasta* nakshatra day along with *panchami* in the next month.

For the older people the day is held as a day of rededication to the concept of *Gayatri* and all that it symbolizes ; they cast off their old threads and put on new ones.

Let me conclude with a few lines from the address of the Rishis uttered thousands of years ago at the convocation of the pupils who had finished their studies and were then returning to their homes, to marry and settle down in life, in the *grahastasrama*, the second of the four stages of life :

Matru devo bhava,
Pitru devo bhava,
Acharya devo bhava,
Athithi devo bhava ;
Yani Yani anavadyani karmani,
Tani Tani sevitavyani, no itarani.

May you consider your mother as your god ;
Your father as your god,
Your teacher as your god,
Your guest as your god,
Have regard for our blameless deeds,
and leave out the rest.

The *Avani Avitta vizha* has been noted as an important festival of the city of Madurai in the remote past, when the festivities kept *all* the people awake the whole of the night.

Naturally it could not have been this special ceremony which is peculiar only to the brahmins. We do not know what that festival was.

Not only the brahmins, but some others of the artisan classes also take to the sacred thread investiture ceremony on this day. They are the carpenters and smiths (blacksmith, goldsmith etc. the pancha kammiyar, who style themselves the *Visva brahmins* and therefore claim a right for the investiture. Besides, even the oil monger community people claim this privilege (holding that they are also vaisya in the four varna classification).

Mukta vidruma hema nila dhavala-
chayair mukhais trikshanaih,
yuktam indukala nibaddha makutham
tathvartha varnatmikam,
gayatrim varadabhayankusa kasas
subhram kapalam gunam,
Sankham cakram atharavinda yugalam
hastair vahantim bhajer.

—*Gayatri samashti stotram.*

AVANI MULAM

This is the day of the *mula nakshatra* (*scorpionis*) occurring in the Tamil month of *Avani*. It is of significance in Saiva hymnology. When Manikkavacakar, as Tennavan Brahmarayan, was minister under the Pandiya king at Madurai, the king sent him to the east coast with considerable gold to get some horses for his cavalry. Arab horses were then said to have been brought there. But Manikkavacakar spent all the gold at Tirup-peruntarai on the way, in building a temple for Siva, as he had now come under the influence of Siva, who had appeared there in the form of a *guru* in order to redeem him. When the king sent a messenger to him reminding him of his mission of purchasing horses, he sent back word, under instructions from his *guru*, that the horses would arrive on the day of *Avani Mulam*. The legend is that jackals were converted into horses and delivered to the king on that day and

the further story is well known. When the horses ran away as ackals in the night, Manikkavacakar was punished by the king. To help the devotee, Siva caused the river Vaihai to overflow and breach the banks, to close which He came to Madurai as a labourer for an old woman, Vandi, taking her broken *pittu* as wages. He received a cane thrashing from the Pandiya for not doing his work. The thrashing was felt by everybody, the labourer disappeared and the king realized that all this was a sport of Siva. Siva gave immediate beatitude to the old woman. Manikkavacakar was released from the king's service. Then he went to Chidambaram, sang his *Tiruvacakam* songs and in time he attained union with Lord Nataraja there.

This is a great festive occasion in the great temple at Madurai where Lord Siva goes to the River Vaihai and returns in a procession carrying the spade and the basket of earth in token of His service under the old woman Vandi.

Avani mulam is symbolic of this story and of the Grace of Siva bestowed on the old woman. In memory of her devotion, a *pittu* offering (*pittu* is steamed and sweetened rice flour) is made to Siva on the occasion of a special *puja* this day.

KRISHNA JAYANTI

Occurrence

The birthday (*jayanti*) of Krishna is one of the most important days of celebration for all the people of India, particularly for the Vaishnavas. The incarnations (*avataras*) of Lord Vishnu on earth are held to be ten (including the *avatar* Kalki yet to come). Of these the Ramavatara and the Krishnavatara are held to be the most important. Krishna is considered to be a fuller *avatara* in the sense that he always had the realization that he was Vishnu the Supreme Being. The *jayanti* or birth day of Krishna occurs on the eighth day *ashtami*, of the dark fortnight of the Tamil month of Avani (August-September). Vishnu is considered to be of black complexion and hence the Krishnavatara also is held to be dark complexioned and his avatar in the dark fortnight is also appropriate. The complexion of Vishnu is of course black,

the colour of the rain bearing clouds (and blue that of the deep sea). The day is called by a number of names as *Janmashtami, Krishna jayanti* and *Sri jayanti.* Rohini is the birth star of Krishna and it is in conjunction with the moon on this day. It is *Gokulashtami* because the birth of the child was celebrated on this day in the Gokula or the cowherds' quarters at Madura (in North India now called Muttra).

Significance

The Indian people have been fond of celebrating the descent of God on earth as a child. The Omnipotent and Omniscient formless aspect of God is something the philosophies wrangle about. For the ordinary people, the form is more endearing and more evocative of devotion and love and through love, surrender. Hence Balakrishna the child, much more than even Rama, in Vaishnavism, and Balasubrahmanya the child in Saivism, are most beloved of the people. Of the Hindu Trinity, Vishnu is the protector and the preserver and Krishna is the favourite incarnation of that aspect of God.

The concept of Krishna as a grown up is for the adults. His role of messenger for the Pandavas in the Mahabharata war, his driving the chariot of Arjuna on the battle field as Parthasarati and many other roles are for the adults and the philosophers. He taught the Gita, the gospel of action, to Arjuna one who would not fight and do his duty to himself and to the whole world. Gita is one of the three Scriptures or *Prastana Traya* in Hinduism. But he is always the ageless child Krishna to the womenfolk and the children and his attraction transcends the barriers of time.

Observance

As in the case of the other important festivals, the whole house is hung with festoons and decorated with *kolam* on this day. An interesting feature of the *kolam* on this day is that tiny little feet are drawn in kolam one after the other, the right and the left in proper order, from the entrance on the road down to the place of the Krishna puja, particularly the little corner where he receives the eatables that have been prepared and served for him, and where he showers His

grace on his devotees here. Many families have a small image of the child Krishna in bronze and worship is offered to this Krishna *vigraha* in the usual manner. This is the crawling Krishna who is fond of stealing the butter from the pots hanging in their nets in the houses of the cowherds and gopis. The puja is conducted in the evening with a number of sweets and confectionaries like seedai, tengulal, murukku etc. (confections made of rice paste and baked in oil, all hard articles to be munched).

Krishna was born in the night and so the festival is chiefly done after night fall. Krishna is the eternal child and so naturally this is a day of great rejoicing for the children and the womenfolk, who participate fully in the joys of the children.

Legends

The story of the birth of Krishna is well known throughout the land. Krishna came to the earth, according to the Puranas, to depopulate the earth which had become over-populated and Bhudevi was unable to bear this burden of over-population. The ruse which he employed for achieving his mission was considered to be the Mahabharata war. Learning that the eighth child of his sister Devaki would kill him, Kamsa put her and her husband Vasudeva in prison and killed all the first seven children. Krishna was born as the eighth child, but by divine prompting and guidance, Vasudeva took him to Yasoda in the Gokula, the cowherds' quarters, and brought back her new born infant, who was in reality Maya the great Force of Illusion, to replace Devaki's child in prison. When Kamsa came as usual for killing this child, it flew away from his grasp telling him that the child was safe in the Gokula and would in time kill him. Thus was born Kamsa's hostility to Krishna which ultimately resulted in his being killed by Krishna, his own nephew. The life and exploits of Krishna are the subject of seven *Bhagavata puranas* in Sanskrit and two large *Bhatavata puranas* in Tamil, and of innumerable *puranas* in the other Indian languages.

Krishna has been drawn in a thousand varieties of pictures all over the Bharata nad. The forms of Balakrishna stealing curds and butter from the gopis' pots, his dancing on the hood

of the multi-headed serpent Kalinga in the Kalindi river, and his playing the flute as Venugopala with his fellow children and cows and calves around him are some of the great favourites in Tamilnad.

In the whole of North India, the cult of Radha Krishna is the most popular. Radha is usually pictured as an young girl of the cowherds' clan and as the lady love of Krishna. Radha however is not an ordinary human girl: she symbolizes the individual soul that is longing for the grace of God and for union with Him. The *prema* of Radha is the transcendental eternal *prema* of the human soul, the *jivatma*, to the eternal lover the *Paramatma*. All the *kridas* or sports of Krishna in the Brindavan symbolize this aspect of philosophy.

In the place of Radha, the ancient Tamils have created *Nappinnai*, again a daughter of the cowherds' clan who typifies the longing of the human soul for the grace of God. The Nappinnai legend is one which is found in the earliest pieces of Tamil literature and it shows the spread of the Krishna cult in the south in the most ancient past. Not only the Vaishnava Saints like Andal, but even the Saiva Saints mention Nappinnais she is mentioned by classics like *Silappadhikaram*.

Special Features

Women are fond of decking their little daughters on this occasion in the form of Krishna and they go about visiting riends' houses. Small girls dressed up in dhoti in the orthodox *mulai-kacham* style, with many floral and golden wreaths round fhe neck and the peculiar hair style of Krishna wound into a cluster in front, with a flute in the hand is indeed a sight for the gods to see. The peculiar style of the *kolam*, drawn on the floor in the afternoon and the different eatables in which butter plays an important part are some of the special features of the elebration on this day.

A special item of merry making, which has almost gone ou of existence may be mentioned here. A ritual called *uriyadt jiruvila* is celebrated in Vishnu temples on the day of Krishna tayanti, to remind people of the stealing of milk and butter by

the child Krishna from the pots which were hanging in the *ayar* homes. A very smooth vertical pole is planted on the ground at the top of which a pot is hanging from a pulley. The pot is tied to a string which is held on the other side by some one who can lower it or raise it at will. The smooth pole is further smeared profusely with castor oil to make it slippery. Some money in the shape of coins is placed in the milk pot and the milk and the coins become the property of the person who climbs up the pole and reaches up to tho pot and strikes it with a short stick. For sometime, the pot is kept beyond the reach of the climber by pulling it tantalisingly up over the pulley from the other side. The pole is indeed very slippery, the climber is also treated to a splash of cool water, and naturally it is extremely difficult for any one to climb it, hold it with the left hand and reach the pot hanging at the top. The climber of course gets the prize of the pot of milk and the coins placed in it. This has been a source of great mirth for all the people on this day. (*Uri* means the rope net in which the pot of milk is hanging, and *adi* is striking.)

Literature

Vishnu (Tirumal) is the presiding deity for *mullai* the forest region, in the Tamil literary convention of the five physio-graphical regions. The *ayar* or the cowherds' clan is the one that brought him up; his foster father and mother in Gokula are Nandagopa and Yasoda. Infinite are the stories connected with his life there amidst the cowherds and the *gopis*, who represent all the infinite souls that receive the grace of God. Apart from the two large *Bhagavata puranas*, almost all Tamil literature praises Krishna. The *Aychiyar kuraval*, or the songs of the *ayar* women in *Silappadhikaram* consisting of 16 verses is one of the most lyrical and sublime pieces of Tamil devotional poetry. In form, lyrical appeal and content, 'they can compare favourably even with the *Alvar prabandham*. Then we have the works of the *alvars* themselves. Composed between the 6th and the 9th centuries they are part of the rich literary treasure which the Tamil language possesses and which can well be the envy of any civilized nation in the world. Of all the songs, the songs of Periyalvar require special mention here. Periyalvar, the confirmed bachelor in real life, constituted himself as the father

of Andal and brought her up as a mother. He sang a song of benediction on Him, a *pallandu*, blessing Him 'may you live long, which earned for him the title of Periyalvar, the Elder Alvar. The songs of Periyalvar on the birth and boyhood pranks of Krishna and the songs of Andal on her dream marriage with Krishna are some of the superbly lyrical poetic treasures of the language. The songs of Andal were the inspiration for the songs of Mira about eight centuries later in North India. The great legacy of the Tamils in the form of lyric poetry on Krishna is infinite and it culminates with the *Kannamma* songs of the modern national poet Subrahmanya Bharati.

Look at this little child,
Given to flower-tressed Yasoda,
By Devaki, like the nectar,
Arising from the cool sea.
Look at this little child,
Holding and sucking its toe,
Look at his lotus feet,
O crimson lipped girls,
Come and look at him.

— *Periyalvar*

Oh my dear, a dream I dreamt :
The drums are sounding,
The conches are blowing.
Under the canopy hung with
Pearls and floral wreaths,
Came my love, the great Madhusudan
And clasped my hand.
O my dear, a dream I dreamt.

— *Andal*

THE ONAM FESTIVAL

The *Onam pandihai* is a national festival of the people of Kerala. It is celebrated by all irrespective of caste or creed. It occurs on the day of the *Onam* (*Tiruvonam*) *nakshatra* in the month of Avani (August-September). This is considered to be a harvest festival of the West Coast areas, when the land is said to flow with milk and honey after the plentiful harvest of

paddy. The rains in the area commencing by the end of May stop by August. The resultant bounty of nature culminates with the harvest which is an occasion among the people for unparalleled rejoicing. The cry of *onam onam* will rend the air and the whole country will reverberate to the sound of the hilarious mirth-making on the occasion. People now rejoice with a common brotherliness and fellow feeling irrespective of caste, class or creed. They abandon themselves with limitless gusto to feasting, dancing, games, boat-racing and the like; even gambling and drinking are not wanting.

In orthodox lore, *Onam* is the day on which the constellation *srona* (aquailae) is on the ascendant. The same star *Tiruvonam* in the next month, Purattasi, is hailed in all Vaishnavism as the birth day of Mahavishnu; the Tiruvonam of Aippasi, the next month, is named as a festive day by Saint Tiru Jnanasambandhar of the 7th century. But yet a special significance attaches to this Onam day; it is considered to be the birthday of Sri Vamana murti, the fifth *avatar* of Vishnu.

The story of this *avatar* is well known. Maha Bali chakravartti, the asura sovereign, was ruling the land in a just manner, following the Dharma sastras, much against the general behaviour of the asuras. Naturally he was much beloved of the subjects and great merit accrued to him. But yet he was an asura and so the devas, considering him to be their foe, were jealous of him and his good deeds. So, very much desiring to put an end to his rule, they persuaded Vishnu with their prayers to come down on earth to suppress the might of Mahabali. Accordingly Lord Vishnu was born as Vamana the son of Kasyapa, in a very dimunitive form, little more than the size of a thumb. The Tamil poet Kambar would say that this form was one which even the parents despised. Learning that Mahabali was indulging in a festival of the giving of anything to any people who asked, Vamana went to him in his ugly dimunitive form and asked for a gift of three-feet space from him. Mahabali's preceptor, Sukra, the guru of the asuras, intervened and pointed out that the beggar was no less than Lord Vishnu, now come before him to do him harm by some deceit. But Bali, bent upon his giving, was glad that the great Lord should go to

him a-begging and would not heed Sukra but granted Him the three feet space. Vamana assumed the Trivikrama or universal form, measured the whole earth with one foot, and the vast heavens with the other foot, and asked Mahabali for the space promised for the third foot. Realising that the supplicant was really Mahavishnu Himself, Mahabali bowed before Him and offered Him the crown of his head. Vamana placed His foot on the head of Bali and pushed him down into the nether world, say the legends. All *bhaktas* ask only for the feet of the Lord to crown their head, and this prayer was joyfully realized by Bali. This is a wonderful story, most wonderfully and part-humorously narrated by the epic poet Kambar in the *Balakanda* of his Tamil *Ramayana*.

Now Bali prayed to Vamana that he be permitted to go back to the earth on this day and see his people; his prayer was of course granted. Hence the Kerala people imagine that Bali is returning to see them all and so on this day they put on a great exhibition of joy and festivity to welcome him.

The Kerala people have their own way of celebrating this Onam which is not sufficiently known outside their own groups. The courtyard of each house is cleaned and where it is an earthern floor, smeared with cowdung water as is usual in all the southern region.

The Onam festival begins even nine days earlier than the day of the Onam. On the day of the *Hasta nakshatra* it commences, and goes on for ten days. On the first day children go round and collect a profusion of flowers In the courtyard, a floral design like a circle, or a star or any favourite figure is made with heaped flowers in front of a lighted lamp. This is called a *pook-kalam* (floral hall). The flowers are removed and thrown away in the evening. On the first day flowers of one colour are gathered and offered on the pook-kalam; on the second day flowers in two colours, on the third day three colours and so on, up to the tenth day when flowers in ten colours are collected and arranged in a heap on the design. The flowers are arranged in circles, one round the other and each circle is decorated with flowers of a single colour. Thus the whole arrangement will naturally give a grand total effect. This floral

carpet is to welcome Mahabali who will be arriving there. This will be the occasion for night long dances, fireworks, boat races and even bull fighting. Girls also have a great role in the games and *attams*.

The last three days of the ten are days of special feasting and rejoicing. The tenth day is the culmination of all this festivity. A special clay image of Mahabali, said to be Tiruk-Katkarai Appan[1] is prepared on this day for worship. This may be a foot in size. It is adorned in clay like the Rajah Mahabali, with a crown and other regalia. Flowers are heaped so as to cover the whole form of this Appan. Chief among the flowers is the common white tumbai (*leucas*) which is considered to be a favourite flower of Siva. It is generally found as a weed in cultivated gardens and is in great demand in treating the ailments of infants: a drop of *tumbai* floral juice is administered daily to the new born infant for a period of several months.

Boys get up in the morning even by three a.m. and perform the puja, which is generally over by about nine in the higher class quarters, and by 12 noon in the lower class quarters. The noon food and feasting is easily comparable to the Dipavali feasting in the Tamilian homes. Characteristically there is also the wearing of the new cloth known as *Onak-kodi* by all the members of the household. Presentation of clothes is made also to dependents and servants. A small towel soaked in yellow turmeric water is worn round the waist by all the boys. In the evening the image along with the flowers is taken out by the boys and consigned to the sea or the river.

In some areas of Kerala, a young man puts on the costume of Mahabali and goes about collecting rice, fruits, coconuts and clothes, and even money in the morning from every house. He wears a crown, puts on a dhoti in red and yellow, and goes

1. Tiruk-Katkarai is a Vishnu shrine close to the Shoranur-Ernakulam railway line, sanctified by the songs of Nammalvar in his Tiruvaymoli, where he calls him Appan, the Father, and this has become the name of Lord Vishnu here. His consort is known by the name of Perum-selva-Nayaki.

ringing a hand bell from house to house. On hearing the bell, members of the household go out and receive him, and wave an *arati* (saffron coloured water with a lighted lamp in the middle) before him. He goes in, worships the floral offering in the yard, blesses it with a few flowers and *akshata* and receives the presents of the house.

On the Onam day, the newly wed couples are feliciated with an improvised *unjal* (swing) made of twisted coconut leaves at the moment. In the evening children play a kind of *kolattam* called *Onamtallu*. *Kaikottikali*, a sort of *kummi* is the chief game played by the people on this day. The whole day is spent by all the people, young and old, men and women, in games plays and entertainments. *Onakkali*, *kuravan kali* and *mopla-muttu* are some of the other chief items of mirth making. The *nendran* variety of the banana is the peculiar species special to the Kerala area. It is cooked, eaten as fruit, preserved and utilized in a dozen other ways. The *chakkai*, as the jack fruit is called there, is also a familiar fruit on the occasion.

The Onam for the son of Malabar is just like the Pongal for a Tamilian. One has to be born a Malayali to realize its full significance and pleasure,

6. PURATTASI

SARASVATI PUJA

Significance

This is the most important All-India festival celebrated with great pomp and rejoicing throughout India. When Indian rulers ruled over some of the states like Mysore, it was a magnificient state festival. The Sarasvati puja is the last day of the culmination of a *puja* which is being performed for nine days and so it is also called *Nava ratri* (nine nights). Nine days are set apart for the *puja* because the number nine is considered a mystic number. Any addition or multiplication leaves it undisturbed ; all the other numbers are held to be contained in it. So also is Sakti, who contains all the universe in her and is undisturbed by anything external.

The festival is celebrated on the nine days following the New Moon day of the month of *Asvina* (in Tamil usually *Purattasi*, September-October) and culminates on the nineth day, called the *Maha navami* (Maha - great). The tenth day called the *Maha dasami* is also included in the celebrations and then it is called the *Dasarah* (ten nights) festival. The great importance of the festival has earned for it the title the *Maha* (or *mahar*) *nonbu*. The *Mahanonbu* was being celebrated in the village schools in the past for many days after the puja with a grand display of many intricate patterns of *kolattam*.

The festival has now become, among the well-to-do urban people, one of great fashion and pomp.

A number of our festivals are in celebration of Sakti, the Energy of the Supreme Being; of all these, the *Navaratri* festival is the most important. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva (as Rudra) are considered to be the Tri Murti governing the three eternal functions of Creation, Preservation and Dissolution. Their functional energy is separately considered to be the three Saktis, Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati (here conceived as Durga). In the Tamil language, they are called the *Kalaimahal*, *Alaimahal* and *Malaimahal* and they are considered to confer Knowledge, Prosperity and Valour respectively. Three of the

days of the nine of *Navaratri* are set apart for each of these goddesses or Saktis: Durga presides over the first three days; Lakshmi over the second three; and Sarasvati over the last three. As the nine days conclude with the days of Sarasvati, they are collectively known as *Sarasvati puja*.

Let it be remembered that there are really no three deities, Sakti is one and for the sake of the festival, they are conceived of as three in three different aspects. Rajarajesvari is the composite form of the presiding deity of the nine days, festival and she has within hereself the three aspects of Durga' Lakshmi and Sarasvati. Uma (or Parvati) is the benevolent aspect of Sakti the consort of Siva, called also His *Grace* in philosophy. But another aspect of Hers is here invoked in the festival, a fierce one, and here She is known as Durga (sometimes confused with Kali, who is different).

The Puja Proper

The *Sarasvati puja* in common knowledge is the day dedicated to the worship of books. Today we are having printed books. But till the dawn of the century, people still used palm leaf books. So this day was set apart to take out old palm leaf books, clean them, oil them with a special oil to which an insecticide was added, and pile them up artistically for the day's puja and worship. The most common books so worshipped in the puja were the Saiva and the Vaishnava canon, *Kamba Ramayanam*, some puranas like *Periyapuranam* and *Tiruvilayadal puranam*, and others like *Tiruppugazh*. The class books of the school going children of the house were also stacked up in a separate pile. Worship was offered to this pile of paper books as well as the palm leaf books. Generally no other *kalasa* or *sandal* is installed to invoke the Muse of Learning.

A new piece of string; soaked in turmeric and sandal is passed over the pile of books, probably in token of ornaments offered to Sarasvati. Lighted *kuttuvilakkus* are placed on either side and the puja offered as usual. The whole house is of course decorated with colourful and artistically plaited festoons of tender coconut leaves and mango leaves; paper decoration is

not used. The floor is decorated with *kolam* over the entire house. Books etc. are placed on a wooden pedestal. Cooked rice with ghee, coconut, jaggery and bananas, along with betels are offered at noon.

As usual, the food offerings, on five, seven or nine plantain leaves, are generally distributed after the puja is over, to working class dependents of the village. *Vadai* and *payasam* are there for the children. Devi sahasranama would say that payasam is a favourite of hers. A *sundal* offering (boiled pulses) is made in the evening and this is distributed to the village children and others who assemble. There is quite a good amount of singing in praise of Sakti by the children and also by all the elderly women folk.

The next morning a small puja with food offering is made and then the pile of books is removed at an auspicious moment The children do not touch the books the whole of the Sarasvati puja day, but now when the books are taken out, they are made to sit down and study a few lines.

Sarasvati, the goddess of learning is always conceived of in spotless white. Knowledge or *jnana* is Light and so she is portrayed as pure white; her dress is white, her ornaments are the pearl and the white crystal gems; she is seated on a white lotus. On her hands are the crystal white rosary, the book and the *vina*. White is also the colour of purity.

The Durbar of Sakti

The great thing about the Sarasvati puja is the laying out of the *kolu* for the Sakti. Sakti as the great power in the universe is supposed to hold a royal durbar, or to sit in state with all the royal paraphernalia of ministers, council, troops and other attendants all the nine days. To create this effect, elaborate arrangements are made in each household with the help of masons, carpenters and other artisans to arrange benches, planks etc. in a gallery of seven or nine steps. Sakti - an image or a beautiful picture of her - is placed in a central place on the steps and around her, above and below and along the sides, all the other deities with their mounts, celestials, sages and human

beings are placed singly and in groups to create the myth that She is present there with all her retinue. Small dolls, figures and tastefully decorated toys are placed in the gallery to illustrate all the legends and stories of the deities mentioned in the *puranas*. Scenes from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Sivapuranas* are depicted there. Even modern political scenes from the freedom struggle are not wanting. Other contemporary life also is depicted. Animals and birds also play a prominent part. The whole is decked very lavishly in colour, with festoons, lamps and the like.

This arrangement continues for all the nine days and each day the layout of the figures and dolls and the legend motif are changed according to the imagination and creative talent of the lady of the house or the children as the case may be. Every morning, girl children go out from their house to the houses of neighbours and friends with a small cup of *kumkum* to invite them to go over and see the *kolu* in their house. The very streets will present a gala appearance in the mornings with the girls from all the houses going out to invite one another, in all their multi - coloured dress hair style and flowers The same gala appearance will be there in the evenings when the invitees respond and the others return the visit.

The children who go out to hand over invitations are decked out in different costumes each day - as Krishna, as Rama and so on. All these elements cumulatively help to create an atmosphere, not earthly, but celestial, one which was actually lived in the ages past. It was indeed a glorious life for the entire community for the period of ten days.

Persons thrown by circumstances of modern economic necessity into distant and unconnected urban locations have only to content themselves with postal invitations sent out in the name of the children.

The visit is usually between 6 and 7-30 p.m. A *dipa aradana* is done to Rajarajesvari the presiding Sakti in the *kolu* and the eatables offered are distributed to the visitors in sumptuous quantities. There is a grand concert of singing in front of Sakti both by the children of the home and by the visiting children and ladies and everybody joins in the chorus.

Children very carefully watch what is being done in one house in the way of display of *kolu*, the embellishments, the songs and the dishes, and the next day they set about emulating these in their own houses. Thus this one festival whets the sense of competition in the children in all the arts and in creative activity in a healthy manner.

The dolls and figures and the other paraphernalia are dismantled on the eleventh day and carefully stored in boxes or almirahs to be taken out again one year later for display a few days before the next Sarasvati puja.

What has been said so far is the actual practice of the puja by the Hindu community in general. The sastras lay down certain more rules. Where it is not possible to have the celebration for the full nine days, it may be done in the last three days: invocation (*avahana*) on the seventh day, worship of Sakti as the destroyer of the Daksha yajna on the eighth and the final puja of Sarasvati on the nineth. Where even this is not possible, worship of Sarasvati on the nineth day alone may be done. This is what is being generally followed by all classes of society in Tamilnadu.

The puja is also identified with *Rama lila*. The nineth day is held to be the day of Ravana-vadha, slaying of Ravana. Rama is considered to have performed the *navaratri puja* and secured victory over Ravana.

Those who celebrate the festival elaborately do a puja daily for nine virgin girls of the ages two to ten years, treating them as the Nava Durgas - Kumari, Trimurti, Kalyani, Rohini, Kali, Chandika, Sambhavi, Durga and Subhadra. These *nava durgas* are symbolic of nine qualities: joy in babies, bestowal of children, education, freedom from sins, courage, wealth, success in efforts, removal of obstacles and fulfilment of desires. The visiting girls are presented with flowers, sandal, *kumkum* and turmeric, fruits, looking glass, blouses and sweet dishes.

One of the most glorious and gorgeous festivals in the whole of India was the Dasarah festival of Mysore. The introduction of democracy and the abolition of the Maharajahs has done

away with this great glory of India. In the days when the Rajahs celebrated this festival, a puja was performed to the horses and elephants also.

Literature on Sarasvati

A very common practice among all the people of Tamilnadu will illustrate the universal veneration in which Sarasvati is held. No one even today will touch a piece of paper, with his foot because paper whatever it be, represents a book and a book is the abode of Sarasvati. So even if one happens to touch a piece of paper, unknowingly with his foot, or step on it, he will immediately stoop down to take it up and press it to his eyes in token of his respect.

There are many poems in Sanskrit and in Tamil, in praise of Sakti in her various aspects such as Uma, Durga, Kali, Lakshmi and Sarasvati. These are sung daily during her worship.

The poets Kambar, Ottakkuttar and Saint Kumaraguruparar are traditionally considered to be votaries of Sarasvati. There is a small temple at Kuthanur near Peralam in Tanjavur district on the banks of the River Arisilaru of Sangham poetry fame dedicated to Sarasvati, worshipped by the poet Ottakkuthar. We are now familiar with the Sarasvati pictures copied from the drawing done by Raja Ravivarma in the 19th century. But this is not the traditional form. The form laid down in the Silpa sastras can be seen on the eastern side in a separate niche at the southern entrance to the *antharala mandapa* of Gangai Konda solapuram temple (C. 1040 A.D.) That is the form of Sarasvati, a seated form with both legs tucked in, to be seen in all the South Indian temples where her image is installed.

Ayudha Puja

The name by which this most important and fashionable festival, *Sarasvati puja* is known among the rural folk, the poor and the illiterate artisan classes, is *Ayudha puja*, the worship of the tools used by them. *Ayudham* in popular understanding means the weapons of warfare. But in the context of this *puja*,

it just means the tools which help the artisans to ply their creative trades and crafts, the tools which the weaver uses for spinning and weaving, the tiller uses for tilling the soil and reaping his harvest, and even the common tools which the housewife uses for cooking our daily food and for serving it. No tool is kept out here. This is a great tribute to the perennial philosophy that *work is worship.* The sophisticated mind today would fain believe that this dictum is the result of contact with the West. The freedom fighter of today would equate it with the Gandhian philosophy and say that this philosophy has taught us the dignity of labour. To the two classes of thinkers and to others also, we would only say that the dignity of labour was upheld in our midst ever since man learnt to live as a social being, and to make and use tools to eke out his livelihood. The concept of the *ayudha puja* is there in the blood of everyone as is evidenced by this elaborate festival.

When Bharati sang *Uzhavukkum tozhilukkum vandanai seyvom*, he was not saying anything new, but was only echoing and re-stating the age old traditions of the land.

Sarasvati the Muse of Learning in Indian mythology is held as the Muse of Arts also. Hence the worship of the tools for art making is worship of Sarasvati herself. The tools for crafts are worshipped by all people on the Sarasvati puja day, not only by the artisans. Even in the houses of well-to-do people of all classes, the instruments used for plying the various trades and crafts are placed alongside Sarasvati, alongside the books and palm leaf manuscripts, and worship is done to all the articles so placed. No picture of Sarasvati is used for the puja. She is considered to abide in the *books* and the *tools.* A musician would place for worship in addition to his music books and the like, his instruments like his *vina* and the *tambura*, the violin and the harmonium, the flute and the *mrudangam*, the cymbals etc., the piper will have his pipe and the large drum. In ordinary households, all tools in use in the home and in use for the agricultural operations, are placed for worship; the plough, the spade and the sickle, the crowbar and the cutter or bigger knife. The housewife places her vegetable cutter, and dosai-turner, the small wooden and steel measures with which she

measures out the quantity of rice to be cooked; the trademan his scales and weights; the mason his various trowels; the smith his tongs and hammer; the carpenter his chisels, saws, hammer and trying plane; the potter his wheel and rod; the goldsmith his forceps, pipe and furnace; and so on. Not the least article that helps man to carry on his daily profession is omitted. The astrologer or purohit places his almanac (*panchangam*) for worship. Where possible, the articles are individually cleaned well and are given a coating of oil. Most articles are in use every day. They are generally made of iron. So on the day of Sarasvati puja the articles themselves are given a period of enforced rest. The cleaning and the oiling helps to remove all rust. Then they are all marked with sandal, turmeric and *kumkum*, placed by the side of the books on either side arranged *k*in an artistic manner and the entire set up constitutes the image of Sarasvati. A grand conception indeed, without any picture or actual image of Sarasvati in sand or in sandal. The sandal-turmeric soaked piece of string is passed over the entire group, serving as the decking of the deity with jewels and ornaments.

The floral *arachana*, chanting of the *mantras* and singing of songs, offering of food and waving of light are all done to Sarasvati as enshrined in the books and the tools placed for worship. On the day of the Sarasvati puja a noon offering of food is made and the evening offering also. Similarly two more such offerings are made on the morning and noon of the next day, the *Vijayadasami* day. The Sarasvati is given a send off thereafter and all the articles are removed. During the two days, the tools are given a rest; and after removal they are again put to use at an auspicious hour.

So this is the *Ayudha puja*. Sarasvati dwells not only in the lips of the fine poets who compose sweet poetry, but also on the hearts of the wise who overflow with compassion, and more so in the arms of those who go out and till the fields. The concept of the Ayudha puja, that Sarasvati dwells not only in books but also in the workers' arms, had been put into a beautiful verse by the poet Desikavinayakam pillai early in this century in the following verse :

We take refuge in thee, O Sarasvati,
Who joyously danceth in the arms
Of those who go and till the fields,
In the lips of those poets who sing
Sweet poetry, and in the hearts
Of the wise, whose hearts are
Overflowing with abundant compassion.

These concepts fully uphold the doctrines of the dignity of labour and of work-is-worship, so much in need for the development of India of today.

Vijaya Dasami

The tenth day, the day after Sarasvati puja day, is equally important. It is called the *Vijaya Dasami*, the day of Victory. It is on this day that Sakti as Durga secured a victory over the forces of ignorance symbolically portrayed as the Mahishasura, the buffalo-headed demon. This is therefore considered auspicious for education, and so children are sent to the school for commencing the alphabets, on this day. It had been the practice in the past to give presents of rice and clothes to the school teacher, besides presenting slates and pencils to the poor children of the school.

Important temples celebrate the day in the evening with a festival in which Durga is taken out in procession to shoot down the Demon of Ignorance.

This aspect of Durga is considered to be capable of conferring success in enterprises and victory over enemies. Many shrines in Tamilnadu exist as important centres of Durga worship. Durga (Kotravai in ancient Tamil) is considered to be the patron deity of one of the physio-graphical regions in classical Tamil literature called *palai* (the desert region) and in this aspect She is celebrated in all grammar and literature. We shall conclude this article with a verse from *Silappadhikaram*, the well known classic of about 2000 years ago which probably recorded for us glimpses of the Sakta cult in Tamil Nad :

Wrapping round you,
The hide of the elephant
And the skin of the tiger,
You stand on the black head
Of the buffalo of the forest :
You are yet the unassailable,
The sprout of Supreme Wisdom,
Whom the celestials worship,
Far above all the scriptures.

Durga is always portrayed with ten arms indicative of her power over the ten quarters - the eight quarters, and the heavens and the nether-world. She is specially celebrated as the destroyer of Mahishasura, a fabulous demon with the head of a buffalo, the personification of ignorance. She is therefore called Mahishasura mardhani. In recent years, the *Mahishasura mardhani stotra* has been immensely popularized by Sengalipuram Anantarama Dikshitar. It was a great treat to the senses to listen to the stotra chanted by him and his disciples.

Durga Puja in Bengal

In Bengal, Durga puja is the greatest national festival. It is done on the last three days and is called the *Maha puja.* The period corresponds to the *sarat-kala* there, the autumn season; and the presiding deity is said to be called Sarada. A clay image of Durga is prepared for worship. Abhisheka is made to the image of the deity reflected in a mirror. Animal sacrifice was an in separable factor in Bengal in the past. Durga is the slayer of Mahishasura (the buffalo-headed demon) and so buffalo sacrifice was thought to appease her. But this sacrifice has gradually faded out.

Worship of the virgin girl is done on the *ashtami* day, the day previous to Sarasvati puja. On the *dasami,* there is a *tirttavari* (immersion of the image) in a running stream. Durga has ten arms and ten weapons, stands on a lion and a buffalo. The image faces south, with Lakshmi and Sarasvati, and Ganesa and Karttika by her side. The puja rituals of Bengal are vastly different from the peaceful ones in vogue in Tamilnadu.

Some other aspects

A few more points regarding this festival may be commented upon here. On the nineth day, Sakti is conceived of as Shakambari, the bounteous Mother who has the *vegetables* as her apparel. There is a legend regarding this concept that in some remote past, there was a severe affliction of famine, and when people prayed to the Mother for help, she appeared before them in this form, and saved the people from starvation and death by the distribution of the plentiful fruits and vegecables. Many follow this legend and deck Sakti this evening completely with fruits and vegetables.

A word about the dolls. What was originally a display of well decked dolls prepared by the members of the household has now become a display of products manufactured in factories and put on the market. Yet there is some work even for loca, artisans here. Apart from dolls in plastic ware, glass, porcelain etc., there are scores of locally made earthern dolls on display, decorated by tiny dresses made in the home or by the local tailor. Thus we may say that the *kolu* of this festival gives employment to the potter, carpenter, tailor, doll maker (who does them from rags) and so on. Now fashions also play a part in the *kolu* in the matter of dress, hair style and the like. Besides, the handing down of dolls from the past in a family helps to acquaint the coming generations with the ancient patterns and fashions in many things like ornaments, dress, hair styles, the tilak on the forehead etc.

As usual, North India relates even this festival with the Ramayana story. In the generally accepted version of the festival, Sakti slays the buffalo headed asura (the Mahishasuras the symbol of obstinacy and idiocy) on the nineth day, and the next day is the day of the victory celebration, *Vijaya dasami*. On the evening of the nineth day, there is the festival of shooting of the demon by Sakti in all Siva temples North India has a different legend for this part. Ramayana is now enacted by the people. Effigies of Ravana (with a red face), his son Indrajit (Meghanatha) and the huge Kumbhakarna (with a black face) are mounted in an open public square. People

dressed as the victorious characters of the story, such as Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman come out in a procession and shoot arrows at the effigies which are now set ablaze. Darkness sets in and the burning of the effigies with considerable illumination and the sound created by explosive materials placed inside the effigies are a great source of delight to the masses. A general merry making ensues.

But this is only a comic feature found in some parts of the country. However, an element of a great and glorious sociological value remains. The Navaratri festival in a sense bridges the gap between generations. The responsible members of the household naturally will be concerned with the arrangements, setting up the *kolu* afresh every day and looking after the preparation and distribution of the sweets. But the two generations, the children and teen-agers, and the older generation, the people at the grand-parent level, enjoy the festival to the utmost. They have no responsibilities to discharge and so they enjoy the celebrations to the utmost. In the enjoyment, the young and the old get together and to some extent the 'generation gap' is bridged. Children look upto the grand-people for many things and they are placed in the position of helpers to the children. This bridging of the gap is a great event.

I shall conclude this with a prayer found in *Manimekhalai* one of the classical epic poems of the Tamil language:

O Chinta Devi, Muse of Thought,
The unfading lamp lit in your
rich temple of Kalai Niyamam,
The angel dwelling on the lips,
The chief of the celestials and
head of the mortals,
Do thou free us from from all our ills.

And a verse in Sanskrit: I had learnt the following Sanskrit prayer to Sarasvati in my village pial school when I was seven years and it is still ringing fresh in my memory:

Ya kundendu tushara hara dhavala
ya subhra vastravrta,
ya vina vara danda mandita kara,
ya sveta padmasana,
ya Brahma Achyuta Sankara prabhrtibhih
devais sada pujita,
sa mam patu, Sarasvati, Bhagavati,
nis-sesha jatyapaha.

MAHALAYA AMAVASYA

Amavasya is the new moon day; that occuring on the lunar month of *Bhadrapada* (*Purattasi* in Tamil, September – October) is called the *Mahalaya amavasya.* In the primitive times when men lived together clustering as tribes, the leader of the tribe and of the family had naturally to be a great hero, capable of controlling the entire tribe, satisfying its wants in the matter of food etc. and protecting it from the attacks of others tribes and wild animals. Naturally such a person became a hero. As civilization advanced and as man learnt to use not only his physical faculties but his intellectual faculties as well, this kind of hero worship shifted from the tribe to the king; and again to the wise men and sages; and lastly to one's own ancestors, out of affection, love and gratitude, and of course respect also. When such elders departed this earth, their day of death became an annual day of remembrance and celebration.

The departed souls were called *pitru* and their anniversary day was called the *pitru dina.* Rituals came to be prescribed for observing the day as a day of penance and for making copious gifts on the day to brahmins and for feeding them, in order to propitiate the departed spirits. The observance became also part of the daily ritual of the individual and was prescribed as one of the *pancha mahayajna*, the *pithruyajna. Tirukkural* also prescribes this as an important item of the five duties of the householder. The *pithir* are here called the 'occupants of the southern region'; their abode, the *pitru loka* is considered to be in the south : "It is the supreme virtue of the householder to fulfil his obligations to his forefathers, gods, guests, relatives and himself".

Usually a water libation is made with mantras to the departed ancestors on each new moon day which occurs monthly. The new moon day of the month of *Purattasi* is considered specially important for this purpose. It is supposed that *all* the departed spirits get together *on this day* in the homes of their descendants irrespective of their anniversary day. Hence a water libation on this particular occasion is most efficacious in this that it pleases *all* the spirits.

Mahalaya is the total dissolution. The fortnight ending with this new moon is called the *pitru-paksha* or the fortnight dedicated to the remembrance of the ancestors. This is related to the story of Agastya and his slaying the two demons Vatapi and Vilvala. The two demons used to catch up unwary passers by and prepare to feed them. One of them used to cut up the other who had taken the form of a goat, cook him and serve him to the visitor. As soon as the unsuspecting visitor ate up his food, the demon inside used to come out ripping open the abdomen of the eater. The two demons then ate up the body of the visitor. This trick they played upon Sage Agastya, but he knew the trick and he simply said, 'Let Vatapi in my stomach get digested'. Vatapi could not come out. He died and the other Vilvala was also killed. This act of Agastya was done to please the departed souls who lodged the complaint against the demons and from that day, which was in this fortnight, this libation to the ancestors is usually performed to please them.

The *pitr-tarppana* that is offered on the mahalaya day is of a universal character. Usually the *tarppana* is done for the welfare of the forefathers of the doer. But on this day it is done for the welfare of all, not only one's own forefathers, but also to all people, friends as well as foes; to the low and the high, to the outcaste, man and woman. Thus a great value is attached to the day and its *pitr-tarppana*.

The whole period of a fortnight beginning from the day after full moon (called the *pratama*, the first day) to the fifteenth day, the *amavasya* (new moon day) of this month is known as the *Mahalayapaksha* and *Pitru paksha*. All *pitru tarppanas* and *sraddhas* are of course important, valuable and merit-earning

more so when it is the *amavasya* of this month ; it is most meritorious when performed in the *city of Gaya*. There is an ancient legend connecting this with the city.

There was once a demon named Gayasura, who had earned great merit, as was the characteristic of all asuras, by his penances. He was huge, like a mountain in size, and he had acquired a boon whereby any one who touched any part of his body or offered oblations to the departed spirits (pindas) on his body could go straightway to the heavens. Many did so with the result that Yama the God of Death had not much work: heavens had become over-populated. In a cunning way, the celestials, who always considered the asuras as their sworn enemies, made him consent to have a sacrifice performed on his person. When the sacrifice was going on, Gayasura tried to rise up, but the devas crushed him down with all their strength and numbers. Now realising this to be a trick of the devas to kill him, he prayed to Lord Vishnu that all who offered pindas on the site where his body lay should go to heaven. Agreeing, Vishnu placed His feet on his body ; the place has since come to be known as the *Vishnu pada* (feet), one of the places where the pilgrim to Gaya has to perform the *tarppana* and *pinda ceremony*. The other two places for this rite are the *Phalguna river* and the foot of the *Vata vriksha* (banyan tree). The banyan tree is called the undying (*akshaya) vriksaa.* These three are the most important, but the place teems with 45 such places for *tarppana* and *pinda*, such has *Rama sila*, *Preta sila, Brahma yoni* etc., of course all invented to fatten the *pandas* or priests of the locality.

The legend would tell us of the importance of the rituals, particularly on the new moon day of the month of *Sravana (Purattasi)*.

7. AIPPASI

DIPAVALI

Dipavali is probably the greatest national festival of India, celebrated with much rejoicing by people at all levels, ftom the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. It is also one of the most important events in the calendar in Tamilnad. People of all classes look forward to this day for a period of happiness and satisfication. This is the great day of rejoicing for newly weds. The couple are invited to the house of the parents of the bride and there they celebrate their first *dipavali* after the wedding with great rejoicing. The bridegroom is the recipient of many presents besides clothing, some given freely and some others in the modern day probably under pressure, a sort of *Vara-dakshina* in the cloak of voluntary presents. Boys looks forward to many days and nights of firing crackers and little girls look forward to colourful bangles and ribbons. Servants and dependents are waiting eagerly for their annual presents of clothing. Everyone looks forward to a sumptuous supply of sweets.

The bath

Baths are always associated with festivals in India and more particularly in Tamilnad which lies in the tropical area. For any temple festival, there is a bath celebration, a *tirttavari* on the last day, when a representative symbol of the Lord enshrined in the local temple is given a ceremonial bath in the river or in the temple tank. *Masi magham* is devoted to a sea bath, and *Adi-perukku* to a river bath In like manner *Dipavali*, though it means a festival of lights (dipa-lights, avali-row), is celebrated amidst us as the important festival of a bath in oil, done a little earlier than daybreak. *Dipavali* occurs on the night of the 14th day of the dark fornight called *chatur-dasi*, in the Tamil month of *Aippasi* (October-November); the next day is the new moon day, *amavasya;* the bath is prescribed for the *chatur-dasi*.

Unlike other festivals, this one is attended with many important parts. One is the oil bath prescribed for all the people of the house, to be done in the early hours of the morning, before the day dawns. The second is the wearing of new clothes by all the people of the household as soon as the bath is over. The third is the preparation and eating of many varieties of sweets and other eatables in the house. The years have added a fourth element in the form of crackers for the younger people which they begin to fire form not only the previous night but during several nights earlier and continue even for a few nights later.

Each of the components of this festival is significant Unless there is a death in the family in the twelve months preceding, the oil bath is taken by every one, men and women, young and old. The use of *sikkay* (soapnut powder) to remove the oil applied to the hair and the body is a modern urban innovation, Rural people generally applied the powder of the *iluppai* (mahua) oil cake (obtained after extracting the oil from the seeds) to the hair and it served as a good oil remover. *Iluppai* has generally the effect of removing stiffness from the joints in elderly people and it cannot be said that the innovation of the commercial. *sikkay* powder in the modern day has been an advantage. Besides in the rural parts, the oil cake was produced locally and its cost was negligible.

A Social Festival

In rural agricultural families, the dipavali was not only a social festival but it was also socialistic. The previous evening all the village artisans and peasants such as the farm labourer washerman, barber, carpenter, blacksmith and so on were given presents of paddy; oil and oil cake powder, along with new dhotis and towels. Women agricultural labourers were also presented with new saris. Thus there was none in the village who could not have an oil bath at the stipulated time on this day, or put on new clothes after the bath, by reason of poverty. Pre-dawn oil bath is considered to confer the merits of a bath in the Ganges and it is called *Ganga snanam.*

New Clothes

Then the second part - putting on of the new clothes. In our country in the past, people lived to achieve some goals in life and so they ate and dressed to live. Just as food was dedicated to God before eating, clothes also were dedicated to God before wearing People then did not have many items for a change of clothing. They generally purchased a pair of dhotis or saris and these lasted them the year round. Dress was intended only to cover the body and was never a means to show off one's affluence or wealth. As soon as the bath was over, the lady of the house lit a lamp, invoked Vishnu as *Lakshmi Narayana* on it, placed all the articles of clothing purchased, before the lamp in token of dedication, offered all the sweets and other articles of food to the deity, and then everybody put on the new dhotis and sat down for a sumptous breakfast.

Festive Food

The younger members of the family who put on new clothes prostrate before the elders and receive their blessings before they sit at the table for breakfast. Breakfast is generally taken in orthodox households even before daybreak. It consists of the usual items like *idli* and on this festival occasion, there is in addition half a dozen varieties of sweets and the same number of savoury items. depending on the purse of the family. It was a matter of prestige for every rural household to *make* its own eatables for the feast. The modern fashion of adding the varieties by *purchase* from a sweets shop in the city still remains unknown in most villages.

Dipavali occurs once a year and it is an occasion for all round joy. Hence all people make many varieties of the sweets ungrudgingly for the sake of their childsen. These last even for a week after the day and the occasion is one for the children to enjoy and remember for a long time afterwards. The sweets are also distributed to the village dependents. *Dipavali*, like *Pongal* two months later, is a source of great joy to all concerned. The average agriculturist in Tamilnadu generally planted two crops of paddy on his fields, known as *kuruvai* and *samba*. The first was

harvested at the time of *Dipavali* and the second at the time of *Pongal*. So he was able to sell his surplus of paddy on these two occasions and thereby gladly meet the expenses connected with the two festivals.

The *dipavali* bath was known as *Ganga snanam* and peoples men and women, went on a visit of their neighbours and friends, with the greeting *'Gangasnanam acha?'* meaning 'Had your bath?' For women in parttcular this was on occasion to survey and review the preparation of sweets in many houses and the types of saris which were bought and were in fashion at the time.

Crackers are a source of joy to the children. They give themselves up to enjoyment of crackers and fire works for about ten days irrespective of the drain it makes on the purse of their parents. The fire works makers have a glorious trade, coming out with ever new varieties of attractions which cost the boys money and the makers themselves loss in material and lives also frequently in making these explosives. The girls do not generally indulge in crakers or fire works but they also make a demand on the family purse through the glass bangles with which they deck themselves on the occasion.

The Legends

This day is also known as *Naraka chaturdasi* day. in memory of an *asura* (demon) king named Narakasura and, as is usual with every great festival, this one also has an old legend connected with him. He was said to be the off-spring of Vishnu through Bhudevi when he incarnated ;as a boar, Varahavatara, to rescue the Earth from the oceans where he was hidden by Hiranyaksha. Narakasura was ruling over Prakjyotishapuram in the east of India. Being born of Vishnu, naturally he was endowed with great powers, which he used to harass all beings, human and celestial. Besides, he had seized the ear jewels of Aditi, the mother of all the celestials, and the umbrella of Varuna, the Lord of the Seas. So the celestials prayed to Lord Vishnu to rid them of the menace of Narakasura. The Lord thereupon came on the earth, with Satyabhama as his charioteer

and slew him, on this day, at this hour, the pre-dawn hour. His dying prayer was that one who observed the day with bath, feast and fire works should go to heaven. It was granted and hence people celebrate the day at this hour in this festivel manner. It is accordingly called tne *Nara-chaturdasi snanam*.

There is also another significance attached to this day. The, story of Mahabali is well known Though of *asura* extraction, he was a great ruler, who earned a right to the throne of Indra. Lord of the celestials, by his great acts of *dharma* and penance. The jealous celestials, prayed again to Lord Vishnu to go to their succour and humble Bali. He thereupon came to the earth as Vamana the the tiny dwarf (the fifth of His ten Avatars) and secured three feet of land from Bali. With one foot, in the form of Tirivikrama, who enveloped all the universe with his person, he measured the whole earth; with the second he measured all the heavens; and for the third foot the great bhakta, Mahabali, bowed down and prayed to the Lord to place it on his head The Lord did so. The prayer of all earnest devotees is that their head should rest under the feet of the Lord. This came to pass in the case of Bali. And ever since he is ruling over the nether worlds. This is a wonderful story of great significance. The Lord also granted him a boon that the merits of all actions on earth would go to him if the people did not perform a *tarppana* on this amavasya day in memory of their departed ancestors. So, a libation of water to the spirits of the ancestors on the day next to this Naraka-chaturdasi, which is *amavasaya* is considered very important.

Yet, Dipavali is not celebrated in the same manner in all places in Tamilnad. People around Madras do not celeberate it with new clothes. They reserve new clothes to the *pongal* festival. Again, the *dipa-avali,* the row of lights which the name suggests, is celebrated in the annual *karttikai* day throughout Tamilnad, and not on this day.

Even the oil bath does not appear to be a universal feature. Many people outside the Kaveri delta do not celebrate it. Evidently it is bound up with agriculture. Probably one of the reasons for the celebration of the oil bath could have been that

at least on theone day in the year, even the poorestin the land can have an oil bath, so necessary in this tropical climate. Hence also the universal presentation of oil for bath to the less fortunate by those better placed.

Different states in India have different festivals which can be considered their national festivals. Tamil nadu has *Pongal*; Kerala has *Onam*; Maharashtra has *Ganesa Chaturthi*; Bengal has *Durga puja*; the North India in general has the *Holi*. But *Dipavali* seems to be a common national festival for the whole of India.

Sourashtra and Rajasthan commence their New Year on the Dipavali day. Business men start new business and commence new accounts on that day, after worshipping Lakshmi, Ganesa and Sarasvati, and presenting food and clothes to the poor. Bhuma devi, the mother of Narakasura, was naturally grief-stricken on his death but yet she also prayed to Vishnu that those who celebrated this day of the killing of her son in the above manner should be blessed with prosperity. The prayer was of course granted.

Bengal celebrates the three Sakti pujas in consecutive months-Durga along with Sarasvati during Dasarah, Lakshmi in the next Pournima, and Kali on the Dipavali day.

Importance for the Others

To the Jains. Dipavali is the day on which their twenty fourth Tirttankara Sri Vardha nana Mahavira attained *nirvana*. He was preaching for six days in Bhavapuri in Patna district and on the seventh day, the 14th in the dark fortnight of their Karttika month, he left his mortal coil in the early morning and attained *nirvana*. The four classes of devas, the denizens of the *Bhavana Vyantara*, *Jyotishka* and *Kalpa* regions, finding that this was the day when the great illumination on the earth had faded, lighted thousands of lamps and celebrated the morning as a festival of lamps. The *Mahavira sakabda* for the Jains commences on this day. In 1978, their 2505th year eommences.

Dipavali through the ages

Dipavali seems to be one of the two important festivals of an All India nature and not provincial, the other one being Holi. It is also pan-Indian in character, being celebrated in Nepal, Burma and all the Far Eastern territories, Thailand and China. Travellers who had visited India from Europe and the other countries have mentioned it from the 11th ceutury. Dipavali was associated with the Yakshas whose master was Kubhera the presiding lord for riches. Scholars have sought to conclude from this fact that Dipavali was a pre-Aryan festival. By Dipavali is meant here the array of lights and though the celebration of lights has shifted from Aippasi-dipavali to Karttikai, this is understandable since Karttikai is celebrated from the Sangham age in Tamil Nadu. Gujarat even today calls Dipavali the day of wealth-worship, Dhanteras. It has been stated that on this day a winnowing fan is waved through every house in the U. P. villages accompanied by the cry of 'get out poverty'. So its association with Kubhera is understandable.

The Jain anecdote about illumination on the passing away of Mahavira is mentioned in the Kalpa sutra (sixth century B.C.)

Lighting of lamps at all places is prescribed in some Sanskrit texts, besides those that are practised today amidst us, such as river banks, tree shades, mountains, road junctions etc. The celebration was given a momentum by the Vijayanagar rulers. The Akshabhairava kalpa (15th century) again gives an elaborate description of the conduct of the festival by the king which included bath, new dress, elaborate food, fire works and temple worship. A Sanskrit text of the early 17th century says that the fireworks were intended to light the way to the *pitru* to visit the homes of their descendants. Probably the fireworks came to India from China as the name *seenuvedi* (China-cracker) by which they are still known in the rural parts of Tamilnadu would indicate.

Dipavali is not mentioned any where in the inscriptions of Tamilnad. The Sangham poem *Nedunalvadai* refers to the daily worship of the lamp by a lady (*talaivi*) with the offering of

flowers and paddy; but there is no basis for construing it as referring to *dipavali*. Only from the 15-16th centuries do we have definite references to the dipavali festival. We have historical evidence to show that the dipavali oil bath and fire works date back from the Vijayanagar period. But though these might have been earlier, there is no evidence.

The belief in Karnataka is that Lakshmi dwells in the oil and Ganga in the water. Hence they have a separate decoration to the water drum (*tavalai* or *anda*) wlth an yellow string and *kumkum* and prepare the oil by adding a little turmeric and pepper. There are also special songs for dipavali celebrations. The day after amavasya (new moon day) is called *Bali pattimai* which is observed as a special *vrata* day in honour of Mahabali. Harsha's play Nagananda would tell us that, as is being done in Tamilnad today, the father-in-law was giving presents of clothing and jewellery to his daughter and son-in-law. In addition, the father of the son also gave presents to his daughter-in-law on the dipavali occasion. This is indeed a very fine gesture and one which should teach a lesson to the modern bridegroom and his parents. These seem to be bent upon fleecing the poor girl's parents and extracting the full pound of flesh from them for the crime of consenting to give their daughter in marriage to this bridegroom. Dipavali has developed to be an occasioa for such extraction and extortion. The present by the bridegroom's father to the girl is a fine gesture, though it in no way relieves the strain on her father's purse.

The expansion of literacy and the development of journalism have added a new dimension to *Dipavali*. Many journals issue special *dipavali* supplements on costly paper with colourful illustrations which are a delight to all people young and old. This naturally is another source of rejoicing on the occasion.

Dipavali in Different Areas

Each area has contributed its own quota to the legends and observances of Dipavali. Festive food and sweets seem to be universal to India. Wearing of new clothes is a feature of Tamilnad. Lakshmi visits the house which celebrates the Dipavali with

light and food and joy: this concept seems to be a contribution from Gujarat and Maharashtra. Continuous political unrest, invasions and the struggle with the Muslim forces had made noise and sound inseparable features of the celebrations and these had introduced crackers. It may be recalled that even today country crackers are made locally in many villages and what are called *vengaya vedi* (onion crackers) and olai vedi (palmyrah crackers) are still made and used in the villages.

Country rockets had been in use during temple festivals as a signal of public announcement signifying the moment of the deity's coming out from the temple, rounding each car street, return to the temple etc. in times of procession, the times of important abhisheka, of dipa-aradhana etc. This had made people in the past familiar with the making and use of country gun powder in large quantities and this familiarity had enabled them to make small country crackers on the occasion of the dipavali festival.

Kerala folklore has added an interesting story as a back grouud for the advent of Lakshmi to the homes which celebrate Dipavali. The story is in fact a replica of the story of King Lear of Shakespeare.

There was once a king who had three daughters. The first two were mere flatterers and sycophants while the last was a true loving daughter. But he was carried away by the professions of love of the first two and could not appreciate the true love of the last. He banished her by giving her in marriage to a poor brahmin. She was leading a humble life in a cottage. She had enjoined her husband never to return home without something in his hand. One day he could earn nothing and not daring to face his wife with empty hands, he carried a dead snake whieh he happened to find on the way. When she saw this, she just threw it away on their thatched roof. An eagle which was just then flying above after snatching the king's favourite pearl necklace from his bathroom, now threw it on the roof in preference to the snake which it could eat up, and carried away the dead snake. Meanwhile, the king had promised a great reward to

anyone who could find the necklace. Hearing this, the princess took the necklace from the roof and sent it with her husband telling him not to ask for any reward but to ask instead that no lamp should burn in the entire kingdom on the dipavali day. The King accordingly granted this and when Dipavali came, there was no light visible any where in the land. Lakshmi came to visit the land mounted on her owl *vahana* but found no light. not even in the palace. She cursed the king and the entire kingdom, and finding lamps burning only in this princess' cottage, showered all prosperity and blessings on her. The two elder princesses abandoned the impoverished king and went away. The young princess who was now in a royal queenly state brought her father to her own palace and kept him there as king. From that day, people came to understand that lamps and mirth would welcome Lakshmi on the Dipavali day and would give them all prosperity.

The conduct of a festival in Kerala on the same day in the name of *Tiruvatira* may appear curious to the Tamilians. There, it is a celebration in honour of Kamadeva, done chiefly by women. It is important for those who are just married and for whom this Tiruvatira is the first; it is called the Poo-Tiruvatira. They take only light food on the previous night and celebrate it with non stop betel chewing. In the early hours of the day, they all hnve a merry bath in the local temple tank, all the while singing the praise of Kamadeva. Then they deck themselves and eat plenty cf bananas and tender coconuts and take to swinging on a *oonjal* (swing). This is followed by a dance called *kaiko-ttukali*, a sort of of *kummi*, also called *Tiruvatirak-kali*, to the accompaniment of *Tiruvatirap-pattu*, a folk song suited to the occasion. Then there is a feast in the girl's house which their husbands also attend. The belief is that the celebration in honour of Kamadeva is for the long life of the husbands; the legend is that in the ancient past Parvati observed this in honour of Paramasiva, Her consort. This would also refer to the *Kama* dahana, burning of Kama, by the central eye of Paramasiva and some of the folksongs sung would also reflect the relevant emotion.

In some places, the Dipavali signifies a three day festival The first day is naturally the Naraka Chaturdasi, the fourteenth on the dark fortnight with its attendent oil bath, new clothes, festive food and crackers. The oil bath on the day is said to confer the merits accruing from a bath in the Ganga many times over.

The second day is the usual *Amavasya*, new moon day, celebrated every where with *tarppana* and *vrata*.

The third day has a special significance not known in Tamil nad. For one thing, it is known as the day on which King Vikramaditya of the Gupta dynasty mounted his throne set with gems and gold and crowned himself as king at Ujjain and started the Samvatsara (Vikramaditya era). This was in 57 B.C.

The Vikrama era observed by some people in other parts of India commences on this day. For them this is the New Year day and business men open their new year accounts on this day. In 1978 the Vikrama year 2035 commences on April 8 (for some who follow Chitra) and on November 1 (for some who follow Karttikai).

It may be remembered that the day after the *amavasya* commences the month of Karttikai in the lunar calendar. This is also known as *Bali padyama*, the day when the King Mahabali was pushed to the nether world by the feet of Vamanamurti. Again this day is the Bharata milap of North India, when Rama crowned himself as King at Ayodhya after the destruction of Ravana. It may also be observed here, that the tradition in North India is to relate all the important festivals with the Ramayana.

A *dipa dana* (gift of lamps) is prescribed for this day; those that made this *dana* would be lifted from the *naraka* (hell) to *svarga* (heaven).

Significance of Dipavali

Dipavali - an array of lights can also have a deeper esoteric significance, We know the first three Alvar lighted lamps of the spirit and in the light had a vision of Vishnu. For Poyhai alvar, the universe was his lamp, the sea the oil burning in the lamp, and the un the wick burning therein. For Bhuttattalvar, love of God was the lamp, earnestness the ghee therein, and the mind was the wick. In the light produced by the lamps, Peyalvar saw Lakshmi, and the glorious form of the Lord with the discus and the conch. Karaikkal ammaiyar, a saint in the Saiva canon, had also sung a similar poem with her tongue as the lamp, and the word and its meaning as the wick and the oil and saw the Lord. The Tamil word for the small earthern lamp is *ahal;* the verb *ahal* signifies the driving away of darkness, here spiritual darkness. So this can be taken as the esoteric significance of lighting the lamp, the dipavali on this day.

To the ordinary Hindu, Dipavali is just the slaying of Narakasura by Lord Vishnu, the removal of an evil to help humanity. But we can probe deeper into the legend and read into it something there of an esoteric significance. That Naraka means hell is well known. Then we have said that the asura Naraka was the son of Vishnu Himself in his Varahavatara. It is worth pondering why the Lord should kill His own offspring. Naraka is the son of Bhumadevi, Mother Earth. So when Naraka transgressed the laws of the Earth, namely right and upright conduct, and pursued evil ways, he had to be destroyed. This holds out a lesson for mankind for all time. Mankind is also children of the Earth, and so when man fails to follow the righteous conduct and pursues evil ways, he is liable to be punished under divine laws, leave alone social and man-made laws. This is the lesson which Dipavali with all its great rejoicing teaches man.

Narakasura on destruction, and on the grant of a boon by Vishnu (Narayana), merged with him. Vishnu is of a blue complexion and that is the symbol of the Infinite. The vast and infinite expanse of the *prapancha*, the universe is the blue sky and so the worship of the concept of Lakshmi Narayana at dawn

after the purificatory oilbath is sure to remind one of the Supreme Being.

The celebration of Dipavali by the Tamil people has a great significance of national integration. Lord Krishna from Dwaraka, in the western seas, went all the way to Prakjotishapuram in North East Assam to slay the demon Narakasura, who was harassing the people. The occasion is celebrated as one of the greatest annual festivals in the extreme South of India today. No other cultural festival of India exhibits this measure of the unity of the Nation.

There is a special significance of a universal character in the celebration of Dipavali. Narakasura as mentioned above was the son of Mother Earth in the capacity of *Kshama* (Forbearance). And so when he who is her own son through the Varahamurti form of Vishnu is killed by Vishnu Himself, she converts her own personal loss and grief into a bestowal of spititual merit and material prosperity by asking it as a boon from Vishnu. That is the message of the Dipavali celebration.

"The false belief that this hell like house called the body is 'I' is Narakasura himself. To destroy that false belief and allow the self to shine as the Self is Dipavali" says Ramana Maharishi.

The Dipavali, an occasian of Light and Joy is not to be merely an outward celebration; it should penetrate inward and help to light up man from darkness to Light, from self imposed misery to a new Hope and Joy, from evil to Good and from attachment to the fleeting to a Love of the Eternal in Spirit.

So this is Dipavali. It is not merely a day of lamps as the name implies externally. It is a day of sharing joys, lighting lamps in the homes of the dependents, the less fortunate and the have-nots, in the form of good and surplus food and new dress.

KEDARA GOWRI VRATA

Occurrence

This is a *vrata* which is observed in different ways in different places. It is observed for 21 days beginning from the tenth day (*dasami*) of the bright fortnight of Purattasi and ending with the fourteenth day (*chaturdasi)* of the next dark fortnight in Aippasi (this is the *dipavali* day).

Observance

Gowri (a form of the Supreme Sakti) is invoked as usual in a pot (*kalasa*) of water placed on a pedestal with mango leaves and coconut in a decorated corner of the house. Underneath the pot, paddy and the other *nava dhanya* (the customary nine cereals and pulses) are strewn. The usual *puja* is done. The general belief is that this is a *vrata* and *puja* to be done by *sum-angalis:* but usually men and women of all castes are permitied to perform it. The worshipper ties on his or her wrist a string made of 21 strands of cotton dyed yellow. Kedara Gowri, the Sakti Parvati dwelling at Kedaram on the Himalayas is invoked on the *kalasa* and the usual *puja* is performed. A fast is prescribed for the *vrata*, and a brahmin feeding on the next day. Brahmin feeding here and elsewhere does not mean merely giving food to any brahmin; it signifies the feeding of the real brahmins the dedicated persons who are striving to get a knowledge of the Brahman.

Another form of this worship is the direct worship of a Sivalinga as Kedara-Isvara. It used to be said that if a Sivalinga be not available the grinder and the grinding stone can be used as the *bana* and its avudaiyar (the two together constituting the *linga*. Those who could not observe the 21 day *vrata* may do it on this day, offering 21 fruits and 21 sweets as food offering on that day.

The Legends

Legends connected with this *vrata* are many. The well known common story relates to the sage Bringhi. He was a very devout Siva worshipper and once when Siva and Sakti were seated together in Kailas, he went there to worship. He was a *jnani* and so he wanted to pay obeisance only to Siva the Supreme Intelligence. He did not like to worship Sakti. So he took the form of a bee and circumambulated Siva alone, by flying between them. Naturally Sakti was enraged. All life in the universe functions by the forces of Siva and Sakti. Now when She was displeased with Bringhi, She withdrew from him all his energy (sakti) which was of course the gift of Sakti. Naturally unable to do anything, Bringhi simply fell down prostrate. Siva thereupon gave him a third leg and a staff for support, but yet he was unable to do anything. Then Sakti on Her Part went to the hermitage of Sage Gautama and learning from him the Kedara Gowri vrata, duly performed it and in due time the *Ardhanarisvara* form was evolved, the single united form where Siva formed the right half and Sakti the left half. Now Bringhi or any other person cannot go round Siva alone but has to go round the two together; the *Ardhanarisvara* form is a visual symbol showing that Siva and Sakti are not separate but are one, indivisible.

The Ardhanarisvara form of Siva is one of His twenty five manifest forms and it is installed in all the large temples in stone and bronze. The famous temple at Tiruchengodu is specially dedicated to this aspect and here the Lord in the shrine is Himself known as Ardhanarisvara.

A detailed origin for the Bringhi incident is also given in a different manner. In the presence of the Lord at Kailas, Sage Narada was rendering divine music and the celestial nymphs Menaka and Rambha were performing wonderful dances. Bringhi rishi also came there and performed a dance which pleased Siva. At the end of the dance he took the form of the bee and circumambulated Siva alone. Then follows the other part of the story.

Sakti prayed to the Lord that all those performing this vrata should have their desires fulfilled and this was granted. The vrata was taught by Nandikesvara to a Gandharva and in due course it reached the earth. Two sisters Punyavati and Bhagyavati were performing the vrata and by the merit accrued, they were in time married to the Kings of Ujjain and of the Chola kingdom. The former continued to perform the *vrata* and was living in all glory. The latter however forgot it and was then discarded by her husband the Chola king. She was naturally very miserable and on the advice of her sister she again took up the *vrata* and performed it dutifully for some time. She was then restored to the love and affection of her husband and regained all her glorious queenly life.

The unmanifest Being is Siva; His manifest Energy is Sakti. They are portrayed in all temples as separate, for the convenience of the *pujas*, and for the worship of the devotees. But essentially they are one and not two, and the *Ardhanarisvara* form and the Kedara Gowri *vrata* stories came to emphasize the truth of this Inseparable Oneness.

SKANDA SHASHTI

The Muruha Cult

The Hindu religion in a wider sense is a religion without bigotry. Although it believes in one God, who is the Supreme, it believes that that Being manifests itself in various forms as Ganesa, Muruha, Siva, Sakti and Vishnu. To an outsider who has not understood the deeper significance of this religion, it may appear to be poly-theistic i.e., a sort of heathen worship of all gods. But this is not correct. God had appeared in various forms to bestow His Grace on the mortals, to suit their own nature, the circumstances and so on. Bhaktas had realized God in different forms and hence these different forms. But essentially He is one and only one without an equal or any superior. The five manifestations listed above are worshipped in different ways on different occasions. As Ganesa the elephant-headed son of Siva, He is worshipped on the day of the *Ganesa Chaturthi*. As Sakti, He is worshipped in the female form on

the Adip-puram, the Navaratri, the Sarasvati puja, the Vara-lakshmi puja and other days. As Vishnu, he is worshipped as Rama and Krishna on their dates of birth (the *jayanti* days), and on days like the Vaikuntha Ekadasi. As Siva he is worshipped on days like the Ardra Darsana, Maha Sivaratri and similar days. As Surya the manifest sun god, He is worshipped on the Pongal day, the Ratha Saptami etc. As Muruha He is worshipped on the Skanda Shashti days, besides Karttikai. All these festive days have equal importance, none being more important and none less.

In Tamil literary tradition, Muruha is the Lord of the hills; when the land was conceived of as the five types of physiographical regions and separate literary conventions arose to portray the life in the five regions, love in the hills was depicted as union of the lovers and He was hailed as the Lord abiding in all the hilly regions. Popular legends depicting Muruha as courting Valli, the daughter of the hill chief would have made him the Lord of the Hills. He is known always as Subrahmanya, The Supreme Brahman. Though portrayed in the *puranas* as the son of Siva, He is indeed identical with Siva and not different from Him.

Puranas celebrating the birth and exploits of Subrahmanya are many. The *Skanda puranam* both in Sanskrit and in Tamil is very large. He is called here the Skanda. Six divine sparks emanated from the six central eyes of Siva; they fell into the *Saravana* tank in Kailas; Parvati took the sparks and joined them together, and Skanda was born, with six faces. He is known throughout North India as Karttik, the Divine child who was nurtured by the six celestial nymphs of the star Karttika. The whole of the Tamil literature, from the most ancient period down to the present day in the modern national poet Bharati, is replete with poems praising the glory of Skanda.

Occurrence

Skanda Shashti is the festival in honour of Skanda celebrated in all the Siva and Skanda temples throughout Tamilnad. It occurs on the sixth day (*shashti*) of the bright fortnight after

new moon in the Tamil month of *Aippasi* (October-November). Devotees of Muruha all over Tamilnad fast for the six days and spend the days in singing His praise, in reading poems and *puranas* depicting His glory, and in worshipping Him in the local temple or in other famous shrines.

Significance

In important temples there is a car festival, where an image of Muruha is drawn in the temple car along the main streets and on the evening of the sixth day, there is the culmination of the six day festival. He receives the spear (*jnana sakti*) from the hands of Parvati the Sakti of Siva and with the spear slays Surapadma the personification of ignorance and ego, the demon who had been harassing the celestials. Allegorically, this signifies the truth that the soul receives the supreme *jnana* (wisdom) from Siva's Grace (Sakti) and with this *jnana* is able to overcome ignorance (*ajnana*) and then reach final union with God.

Special Features

This particular incident, the receiving of the spear from Sakti, is a great and wonderful event even today in the temple of Sikkil near Nagappattinam in the Tanjavur district. Muruha is known there as Singara Vela, the Handsome Wielder of the spear. The image of Singara Vela is placed in front of the Somaskanda shrine after He receives the spear from Sakti. Immediately, Singaravela (*the bronze image*) begins to perspire. Beads of perspiration are formed on His face and hands and other exposed parts of the body, although there are fans (punkas) whirling overhead and two hand fans are waved by Sivacharyas. The beads of perspiration are wiped off immediately by the Sivacharyas in attendance, but they continue to form for a period of about ten minutes: this is a wonder, to witness which thousands crowd the small space in the temple and march past after witnessing it.

The story of Skanda and his slaying of Surapadma is similar to that of Rama and Ravana; it is told in a large *purana* of 10,345 verses, equalled in size and epic narration only by the Ramayana of Kambar. Indra, God of the celestials gave

away the hand of his daughter Devasena to Muruha out of gratitude over His destroyal of Surapadma. Later Muruha courted Valli, the damsel of the hunter clan and married her. He is seen in all the temples with His two consorts Valli to the right and Devasena to the left, on a peacock mount, with a spear in His hand. Allegorically, the spear stands for knowledge, the *Jnanasakti*, Valli for Volition, the *Ichasakti*, and Devasena for Action the *Kriyasakti*. Muruha's courting of Valli (*icha* or volition) signifies that God is ever ready to go to the succour of one who just thinks of God and prays for His grace.

Literature

In the twenty centuries of Tamil literary history there is almost no poet who has not sung of Muruha. Foremost among his singers is the famous Arunagirinatha who has sung about 1500 songs of his famous *Tiruppuhazh* on Muruha, besides other smaller poems. By his harmonious combination of words Tamil and Sanskrit, arranged in the most varied patterns of lilting metre, within the fold of orthodox prosody, he has been able to send millions of the Tamil people, young and old, men and women, the elite and the illiterate, throughout the country, into ecstatic rapture. A single *Tiruppugazh* verse is enough today to restore peace and quietude in a tumultuous and uproarious crowd of even a million. It sways the multitudes today as no other song does. People in their thousands know many of his songs by heart and the singing of a song by any one in a group sends a sympathetic thrill through everyone and tunes a vibrant chord and the entire group begins to sing and dance and sway in wave upon wave.

Tiruppugazh had attracted to itself the highest in the land and even today is a positive force of integration of the classes and the masses. It is history that the late T. M. Krishnaswamy Aiyar, endearingly known as Tiruppuhazh mani, an eminent advocate of Madras and sometime Chief Justice of the High Court of a State in India, went about making Subrahmanya *bhajans* in Muruha temples, bare bodied, a pair of cymbals in his hands, and moved milling crowds of humanity into ecstatic singing and dance by his *Tiruppuhazh* rendering.

The Muruha cult is something unique in Tamilnad which has the greatest attraction for the mass mind. Every rural area has an important Muruha shrine where devotees, mostly from among the masses, carry the *kavadi* (an ornate device across the shoulder for carrying milk and other offerings to Muruha hung in two pots at either end of a pole) and go singing and dancing to the temples in large groups. New types of poetic forms like the *Kavadi-chindu* and the *Kilik-kanni* have been evolved within the last one hundred years in His praise, enriching the language. Muruha is thus a part of the daily life of the Tamil people, as is evidenced by the *Shashti* of *Aippasi* and the *Karttikai* festivas the next month.

Muruha is always young, Balasubrahmanya, like Balakrishna, the symbol of redolent lustrous childhood and youth. Youth is always impetuous and once, Muruha put Brahma the Creator himself in prison for not understanding the significance of the primordial sound *Pranava, OM*. At the intercession of Siva, who heard from Muruha the meaning of OM and was of satisfied, Brahma was later restored to his duty of creation.

All the hills beginning from Tiruchendur in the farthesi south upto Tiruvenkatam in the north are His shrines.

The Legends

The slaying of the Asura king Surapadma by Muruha is the great legend associated with this day. It is symbolically the triumph of good over the evil forces. The struggle between the two forces has been there from the beginning of time and this is just one of the many legends depicting that struggle. The Asuras headed by Surapadma and his brothers were doing untold havoc on the Devas who supplicated before Siva for help. Out of the six central eyes of Siva came out six sparks which were united into one by his consort Parvati to form the Divine child Skanda (Muruha) When negotiations with Surapadma failed, Muruha fought the Asura. Although Surapadma had a darsan of the Universal Form, *Visvarupa*, of Muruha on the battle field, his vanity would not permit him to yield to Him and in the battle the Asura was finally killed in the form of a

tree he had taken. The tree was torn into two and the two pieces took the forms of a peacock and a cock. Muruha took these as His mount and His banner. Out of gratitude Indra the king of the Devas gave his daughter Devasena in marriage to Muruha.

The Shashti festival depicts the slaying of Surupadma and the wedding of Devasena.

The conduct of a six day festival for Muruga takes meaning from His fight with the asuras headed by Surapadma. The devas had to suffer because of their participation in the yajna of Daksha, which was calculated to spite Siva, the Supreme Being, Hence in time were born the asura children of Maya when she disturbed the *tapas* of sage Kasyapa. Maya's children were Surapadma the asura king, his brothers Simhamukha and Taraka, and his sister Ajamukhi. When their atrocities became unbearable, the devas supplicated to Lord Siva, who caused the appearance of Skanda in order to destroy the asuras. The Skanda shashti festival is the festival celebrating the destruction of the asuras by Lord Skanda.

The fight between Skanda and the asuras took place for six days. The first four days relate to the fight with the asura forces. The fifth day was the fight and destruction of Bhanukopa son of Surapadma, the sixth of Simhamukha and the seventh relates to the destruction of Surapadma. The major chiefs were all killed on these six days, the first to the six, in the bright fortnight of Aippasi, culminating on the sixth day Shashti. Hence has come about the sixth day festival of Shashti.

KADAI MUZHUKKU

This is very important annual festival occurring on the last day of the Tamil month of *Aippasi* (October-November) in the areas around Mayuram in the Tanjavur district and along the banks of the Kaveri river. It is considered meritorious to have a bath in the Kaveri *every day* at day break on all the thirty days of the month of *Aippasi*. We can find hundreds of people

young and old, men and women, high caste and low, observing this practice even today with firm resolve. This month is generally the month of heavy rains in the Kaveri delta, and it requires great resolve and stamina to stick to the early morning river bath. The running flood waters of the Kaveri have always been known to do good to the bathers.

The first day of the Tamil month of Aippasi is called the *Tula sankramana*. On this day the sun is considered to enter the zodiacal sign *libra*. River bathing throughout the Kaveri delta commences on this day. In the Karnataka state also, this is a great festive day all along the banks of the Kaveri. The river goddess Kaveri, either as Kaveri or conceived as a form of Ganga, is worshipped on this day on the banks of the river. Worship is done to the river, whether it be Kaveri itself, or a branch of it, or even a small brook or channel carrying water from it, it is all Kaveri. There are a hundred branches in the Kaveri delta. When a river is not present, the tank or well water is Kaveri. After a bath a place for puja is cleared on the bank of the Kaveri, and washed with water, decorated with *kolam* etc. Kaveri is invoked on a pinch of sand, flowers, dipam (lighted lamp) and food offerings such as some fruit or jaggery, coconut and betels are made. The river water is of course sprinkled on all the things, a few of the offerings are consigned to the running stream and the remainder is distributed among the children. Even a few coins are dropped into the waters of the river.

The bathing culminates on the last day of the month, usually the 30th. This is called the *Kadai Muzhukku* (the bath on the last day of the month) This is celebrated as a great festival in the city of Mayuram when the Lord of the local shrine goes to the river front in a procession and takes a ceremonial bath; this is also the last day of a ten day festival in the Mayuram temple. A few minor temples in the city, Vaishnava and Saiva alike, celebrate this day in a similar manner. The normal gathering may account for a hundred thousand people, all of whom take a dip in the waters of the Kaveri simultaneously with the dipping of the temple image in a *tirttavari*. The whole city assumes a festive appearance for the entrie month. Vedic chanting and Devaram singing are important adjuncts to the temple festival.

12

The image of the swami, Lord Mayuranatha, is decked everyday in a new manner artistically in costly jewels and costless flowers. It is a most wonderful and glorious sight, to witness which alone people from the whole district and outside assemble. The decoration of the image speaks volumes for the love and devotion, not to say the artistic skill, of the temple *archakas.*

The Saivagamas would say that a river bath is the most excellent one; bath in a tank is far inferior and bath in well water is least good. What will the agamas say of municipal pipe water?

Literature

The *Brahma-vaivarta purana* deals extensively with the river bath in *Aippasi.* The poem had been translated in verse in Tamil in the 19th century and printed. Besides the several *puranams* on Mayuram (written by Adiyappa Navalar in 6519 verses, and Mahavidvan Minakshisundaram Pillai in 1869 verses) also dwell at length on the bath.

The festival has a sequel. It is said that a lame devotee from a distant place tried to reach Mayuram in time for the *Kadai-muzhukku* bath but could not reach the city. He was able to reach it only the next day. But Lord Mayuranatha was pleased with his steadfast devotion and honest effort and so accepted his river bath the next day (the first of the next month *Karttikai*) and took him to Kailas, His celestial abode. From that day the river bath on the day after *Kadai muzhukku* had also become important. It is called the *Mudavan muzhukku* (the lame man's bath) and is observed by all people ever since. Kadai-muzhukku is not complete without the next day's Muda-muzhukku.

Apart from the fact of a morning bath, the *Kadai muzhukku* disciplines the habits of the individual, although once a year. The *tirttavari* may take place between 10-30 a.m. and 12 noon. Most of the religious minded people do not have any breakfast on this day. They have their first meal only after 12 noon, after the ceremonial river bath is over.

The Kadai muzhukku is also known as the Kadai mukham festival.

Silappadhikaram has half a dozen fine lyrical verses on the Kaveri, in the chapter *Kanalvari* sung by both Kovalan and Madhavi. The verses are supreme lyrical poetry, unequalled in poetic form, sound magic, melody of tune and emotional expression.

Peacocks dance in your flower-bowers
And koels make sweet music.
You just glided along, O Kaveri,
With your charming wreaths, rustling close.

Your charming wreaths rustling close.
And your gentle gait, I realize
Form the might of the terrible spear
Of your Lord, Hail Kaveri.

The Chola monarch is the traditional Lord of the Kaveri

Besides, there are a number of folksongs celebrating the glory of Kaveri, like *Kaveri amman sobhanam, odam* etc.

KARTTIKAI DIPAM

The Karttikai dipam festival in the month of Karttikai (November-December) is one which is observed throughout Tamilnad, in every home and in every temple. This occurs on the day when the moon is in conjunction with the constellation Karttikai (*Pleiades*) and *purnima*. This constellation appears as a group of six stars in the firmament in the shape of a pendant from the ear. As usual, many legends and lyrical poetry have grown round this star. The six stars are considered in Indian mythology as the six celestial nymphs who reared the six babies in the Saravana tank which later were joined together to form the six faced Muruha. He is consequently called Karttikeya the one brought up by the Karttika nymphs.

The Arunachala Legend

The Karttikai festival has its origin in the *Lingotbhava* legend of Tiruvannamalai. In ages gone by, Brahma the Creator and Vishnu the Preserver disputed between themselves as to who was greater and who was supreme. This dispute was a prolonged one and so Lord Siva decided to teach them the Truth. He appeared before them in the form of a huge column of fire, an Effulgent Light. When the two saw it, they referred their quarrel to Him. He told them that he who could discover the crown of the Light or Its foot first might be considered as the superior. Accordingly Brahma took the form of a swan and flew up in an attempt to find the crown of the Light, while Vishnu took the form of a boar (*varaha*) and began to dig down to find the foot of the Light. Neither succeeded. The knowledge dawned upon them that the Light was superior to both of them. This is the significance of Arunachala. The *Karttikai* festival is celebrated to bring out this great truth that the Supreme God is far beyond the ken of the Creator and the Preserver. Brahma and Vishnu thereupon prayed to the column of Light, Siva, to be ever present in that place in the form of a *linga*. Siva agreed The whole *hill* of Tiru Annamalai (Arunachala) is that *linga*, the *sthavara linga*.

The Tiru Annamalai temple is located at the foot of a hill, over 2500 feet in height. This hill itself is considered by geologists to be of igneous rock which means that it is related to fire; probably the rock was more lustrous in the very remote past and hence the appropriateness of the Jothir linga concept to this place. The temple is a very large one, occupying an area of twentyfive acres. It has tall towers on all the four outer walls but the one over the main eastern gateway is the tallest, reaching a height of 217 feet in eleven tiers.

This legend of Siva appearing before Brahma and Vishnu as a column of light is today celebrated not only in the place but in all the Siva temples in Tamilnadu on the *karttikai* day. The appearance of the Light is believed to have taken place on this day. It is celebrated everywhere as the *dipam* festival (*dīpam*-lamp). A column of fire is created in front of each temple and the *utsava murti* of the local shrine is taken out in procession and He gives a *darsan* to His devotees after the fire is lit. Generally this takes place immediately after dusk. People fast for the whole day and take their food only after this *Jothi darsana.*

In memory of this Light, the whole temple is illuminated with thousands of lamps, large and small, and every home also is illuminated in the evening with hundreds of lamps. It is indeed a grand sight to see the temple tower lamps shedding their twinkling light throughout the darkness of the whole night. A special offering is made to Siva on this day, consisting of fried or puffed rice mixed with treacle.

In the city of Tiru Annamalai, the same procedure is adopted for the festival even today. Hundreds of thousands of bhaktas and pilgrims gather in the outer courtyards of the temple from early afternoon waiting for the appropriate time in the evening when the symbolic fire is lit. Sri Arunachalesvara, the Lord Siva of the temple, is taken in a procession around the courtyard. At the appointed time (usually about 5-6 p.m.) the fire on the hill in the background is lit. This fire is made of vast quantities of camphor supported by more than a hundred litres of ghee. The fire continues to burn for the whole of the night and is visible even at a distance of eight miles. It continues to burn

for several days and nights following. The moment the fire is lit on the hill, a *dipa-aradhana* (waving of camphor lamp) is made to Sri Arunachalesvara. The assembled bhaktas have a simultaneous *darsana* of the Lord in the temple as also of the column of Light on the hill. There is a great surge of devotional fervour when the sea of humanity sounds with one voice '*Annamalaik-karohara*' (hail, Hara, Lord of Annamalai) and the sound lingers for a long time echoing from one wall to the other and back and even going as far back as the hill and resounding. Caste, class, creed, age and sex are all forgotten and every one seems to have a feeling that he is enveloped in the grace of Lord Arunachalesvara. The ordeal of fasting and pilgrimage to the temple by several lakhs of people has now reached its culmination and every one now departs for his home after receiving His *prasadam* in the form of the usual sacred ash.

The Festival of Lights

The image of Lingotbhava, installed at the *goshta* (niche) just behind the Mulalinga on the outer side of the *garbha graha* in the western wall in all the Siva temples is symbolic of the manifestation of the Jothi in Tiru Annamalai.

Tiru Annamalai is one of the most sacred shrines of Tamilnad. It is considered superior to all the other eminent shrines. While Tiru Arur confers salvation or *mukti* on one who is born there, Kasi confers salvation to one who dies there, and Chidambaram to one who worships there, Tiru Annamalai confers salvation on one who merely thinks of it. No wonder this shrine is most important, as it points out the easiest way to salvation.

The same ritual is gone through in every temple. In the place of the huge light on the hill of Tiru Annamalai each temple creates a *sokkappanai* in front of the shrine, some distance away from it. This is mostly made of combustible materials such as palmyrah leaves. Lighting of this *sokkappanai* and *karpura aradhana* to the deity in procession are done simultaneously and this marks the culmination of the *Karttikai* festival.

The lighting of a large number of lamps, both in the temples and in the devotees' homes on the *karttikai* day has been a very ancient observance. Saint Jnanasambandhar refers to this in one

of his songs. In the moving song sung by him at Mayilappur in order to bring back to life the young maid Pumpavai from her ashes, he addresses her and asks: "Will you go away from this world without witnessing this festival?" The first verse refers to the general feeding of Sivaganas as a festival ritual. The second refers to an Onam festival in the month of Aippasi. The third verse speaks of the Karttikai festival. He asks: "Will thou go away, Pumpavai, without witnessing the festival of lamps lighted by young damsels on the ancient Karttikai day, sacred to the Lord of Kapalisvaram (the Mayilappur temple)?"

The festival of lights which was celebrated on the *dipavali* day in the ancient past is now celebrated on this day, the Karttikai day. The lighting of lamps also gives scope for fireworks among the children. Children in the rural parts make elaborate preparations some days ahead. They collect the spathes of flowers from male palmyrah trees, burn them and reduce them to a coarse powder. This they tie up into a bag in a piece of cloth and insert it in the stiff fork of any handy stick from the common *physic nut* plant. After night fall on the Karttikai day, they tie up the two ends of the fork into a long loop of string, open the bag slightly at the top of the fork and insert a piece of burning charcoal cinder into the powdered and charred spathes and rotate it over the head by holding the ends of the string. The ignited powder falls all around evenly as bright sparks. The whole street and the whole village will present for a few hours the spectacle of innumerable stars revolving round and round. This is a fine pastime of the children bringing forth a lot of ingenuity and mirth. When the whole thing is burnt down, the children enter the home to have a sumptous repast of puffed rice and pulses with treacle.

The Kenopanishad Story

The traditon of Tiru Annamalai is a story which has its origin in the *Kenopanishad* where we find it in another form. *Kenopanishad* is the second of the ten principal Upanishads of Indian philosophy. Its importance is such that Sankara is said to have written two *bhashyas* on it It consists of four sections: The first two sections define the idea of Brahman as the one Supreme Power and show its distinction from the created world,

The third section deals with a story where the Brahman appeared before the *devas* in the form of a blazing light to remove their ignorance and ego when they boasted that their victory over the *asuras* was due to their own might. This is a kind of allegory, where the senses are depicted as the devas. The fourth section sums up the definition and the story and sets forth ways of meditating on the Brahman. The story is as follows.

The fight of the gods against the *asuras* was made by Brahman. When the battle was won, the gods thought that to them went the glory of the victory. Before them appeared Brahman in the form of a light. The devas did not know Him. They asked one another what It was and whether It was worthy of adoration.

They called Agni, Jatavedas the All-knower, and asked him to go and ascertain what the Light was. So Agni ran up to It. On seeing him, the Light asked who he was and what his power was. Agni replied that he was Agni and that he could burn anything on earth. The Light then placed a bit of straw before Agni and said 'Burn this'. With all his fire, Agni was not able to burn it. So he returned to the *devas* crestfallen and said that he could not ascertain the nature of the Light.

Then the devas deputed Vayu the god of wind. When he approached the Light and said that he could blow off anything on earth, the Light placed before him a bit of straw as before and asked him to blow it off. With all his might Vayu could not even move it. When he returned to the devas and reported his failure, they deputed Indra.

Indra the mightiest of the gods, went but the Light vanished when he approached It. Instead, he met there a celestial lady, most beautiful, Uma the daughter of the snowy mountains, Himavan. He asked her what It was. She told him that It was Brahman the Supreme, who gave them all their glory. Through Her Indra first come to know the Brahman.

This story is very remarkable as forming part of an important Upanishad. It is also particularly significant for the Saivas in this that it refers to Uma the daughter of Himavan. In the Saiva

religion, Uma is the consort of Siva, His inseparable Sakti, representing His Grace. Indra learns here about the Supreme only through His Grace, Uma.

The Karttikai day in the month of Karttikai is celebrated by the Vaishnavas as the birthday or Tirunakshatra of Tirumangai alvar.

The Sokkap-panai of Tamilnadu on Karttikai day has a particular significance in Karnataka. It is callcd *Jwala-torana* in honour of Parvati's entering the fire when she found that Siva did not return after Tirupura dahana, in time as promised.

Literature

Karttikai dipam is celebrated in elaborare chapters in the two *puranas* on Tiru Annamalai by Maraijnana Sambandhar and Saiva Ellappa Navalar, both of the sixteenth century. Yet there are many mentions of the festival from the Sangham period in Tamil literature. Mention by Saint Tiru Jnanasambandhar in the *Poompavaippadikam* has been mentioned. He calls it the ancient Karttikai festival of lights (*tol-karttikai nal...vilakkidu*). Perum Kadumko, the poet who had specialised in singing on the *palai* (poetry relating to the separation of the lady love from her lover, which is the characteristic of palai, the desert region) says that the full moon of this month is 'the good moon that is given forth by the six stars, meaning the Karttikai six star group. He says that the profuse blooming of the *murukku* (red cotton tree) in their crimson brilliance on the mountain tops and the flowering of the *kongu* in the forests are like the string of flames in the lamps lit during this period (*Ahananuru* 183 and *Narrinai* 202). Avvaiyar, the lady poet of the Sangham age, also mentions the flowering of the *murukku* and says the blooming appears like the long string of beautiful flames lit by women folk in hilarions rejoicing on this day (*Ahananuru* 11). Poet Nakkirar, the prince of the poets of the period, says that 'people of the locality decorate their homes with flower wreaths on the occasion of the festival of Karttikai which occurs on the night of the full moon day'.

Karttikai festival lamps are mentioned by the poems *Kalavali narpadu* and *Karnarpadu* and also by the epic poem *Jivaka Cintamani*. There is a tradition in India that the twenty seven stars were counted, not beginning from Asvini as is being done now, but beginning from Karttikai. The poem *Karnarpadu* would mention Karttkai as the first star, *Talainal* (26) *Paripadal* one of the Sangham poems would declare that the capital city of the Pandiyan, Madurai was as lustrous as thependant-like Karttikai star.

The proverbial saying 'like the light placed on the top of a hill *Palamoli nanuru* verse 204) and the mention of Perumkadumko of the brilliance of the crimson flowers on the top of a hill, like the stream of Karttikai lamps, and the reference to the light on the hill top in Karttikai *Jivaka Cintamani* (256) may be direct references to the lighting of the Karttikai dipam on the Tiru Annamalai hill itself.

KAISIKA EKADASI

Occurrence

Among the festivals, this is the finest piece of lyric, if we may say so. It is celebrated on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of *Karttikai* in all Vishnu temples, in honour of a *bhakta* of the lowest caste who was prepared to lay down his life to keep a promise given to a ghost.

The Legend

Tiruk-Kurungudi is a Vishnu shrine at some distance from Tirunelveli in the extreme south of India. This shrine is sanctified by the songs of many alvars like Periyalvar, Tirumalisai alvar, Tiru Mangai alvar and Nammalvar. Vishnu here is celebrated as Alahiya Nambi (the Lord of handsome form). Nambi in the shrine on the banks of the Tamraparni is called Tirup-Parkadal Nambi. Nammalvar, according to the legends was born through the grace ot this Nambi. A legend would say that Nambi listened to the exposition of the Sri Bhashya by Sri

Ramanuja in the form of a *sishya* (disciple) and so He is known as the Vaishnava Nambi. To the west of the shrine is a hillock on which dwells the Nambi known as Malaivazh Nambi.

In the ages gone by, here lived a *pana*, who was a musician of the lowest caste. His self-imposed duty was to play on his *yal* (a lyre like instrument) the tune *kaisika* to Nambi enshrined in the temple, every morning at daybreak. His music so pleased the Lord that He called him *Nam-paduvan*, our singer. As he was an outcaste by birth, he could not enter the temple; so he stayed outside the temple walls close to the main entrance and played on his instrument. He was performing this self-imposted duty joyously for a long period, when one day he had to face an ordeal.

As he was going to the temple, in complete forgetfulness of himself in the joy of his music dedicated to the Lord, he missed his way and strayed into the woods by the side of his usual path. A brahma rakshas (the ghost of a deceased brahmin) seized him there and was about to devour him. The poor fellow was frightened. Yet, the sense of the duty of singing before God gave him sufficient courage to argue with the ghost. He pointed out to his duty of singing before the Lord at dawn. But the ghost would not recognize any such duty. Many arguments followed, but the ghost would not flinch.

Finally he swore on all things held sacred that he would return after singing before the Lord and allow himself to be devoured by the ghost, in order to appease its hunger. The ghost now took pity on him, and relying on him to keep his promise, released him so that he might go to the temple, sing the tunes, and return to be eaten up. Nampaduvan joyously ran to the temple, played his music, more melodiously than ever before, because this was to be his last singing, and retraced his steps to go to the ghost in the forest. Nambi of Kurungudi, wanted to test his steadfastness of purpose in offering himself to be eaten up by the ghost. So He came before the pana on his way and tried to dissuade him saying that saving oneself was most important and so he need not give himself up to

the ghost merely to keep his word. But the pana declined His advice and true to his promise, went up to the ghost, saying, "you can now eat me up".

Great was the amazement of the ghost on seeing the pana's return. It said, "My dear fellow, it is a great thing that you have returned now, to give up your life to me. Who will come back to die ? This is a thing unheard of. And you are of the lowest caste to whom these values in life do not apply !" So saying he begged him to transfer the merit accruing to him out of the singing of the *kaisika* tune for that day. After many entreaties the *pana* did so and because of that merit, the ghost was able to shake off its ghostly form, and with an angel's form went up to the heavens, profusely thanking him.

Celebration

From that day, this day came to be celebrated as the *Kaisika ekadasi*, in memory of the tune the pana was playing before Vishnu in that temple. The celebration is made not only in that temple, but throughout the land in all the Vishnu temples and in all the Vaishnava homes. The episode is narrated in the Sanskrit *Varaha purana* in 92 verses and Sri Bhattar of the 12th century, a Vaishnava preceptor, second in the line after Ramanuja, wrote a Tamil commentary on this chapter. It has also been rendered in verse in Tamil.

The story lives in folk lore as the story of a cow which was going to suckle its calf, was caught by a tiger on the way, promised to return and did return keeping its promise. There are many other stories based on the pana story.

9. MARHALI

THE PAVAI FESTIVAL OF MARHALI OR THE PRE-DAWN BATH

Occurence

"Masanam margasirshosmi" said Krishna in the Gita: 'among the months I am the Margasira (the month of Marhali)'. This month is a cold month and is generally considered not very good or auspicious. But the declaration of Krishna invests it with great significance. In Hindu mythology, the next month *Thai* is the month when the celestials wake up and *Marhali* is thus the pre-dawn month. It is therefore considered a religious duty to rise up before dawn, have the bath in a river and sing the praises of God in the morning hours during this month. The Hindus as a rule are enjoined to get up from their bed and take their bath well ahead of dawn on all days of the year, but this appears to have been given the status of a religious rite in this month.

The pre-dawn bath and the sanctity attached to it finds recognition in Tamil literature even as early as the Sangham age. *Paripadal* refers to it as *Thai-niradal*, bath in the month of *Thai*. This is understandable because in the Chandramana (or lunar) classification the month begins and ends with the *amavasya* (new moon) and so the *pournami* (full moon) occurs in the middle. This *pournami* mostly occurs in conjunction with the star Tiruvadirai (Ardra). In the calculation of the past, the month after the Pournima was called *Thai* and so the name *Thai-niradal*; at the time it had been only a festival of young girls, and virgins at that, who observed their *pavai nonbu* (or *vrata*) in honour of Katyayini devi (an aspect of Sakti) to grant them suitable husbands.

Tirup-Pavai

This has been the subject of two songs known as *Tirup-Pavai* of Andal in Vaishnavism and *Tiru Empavai* (our *pavai*) of Manikkavacakar in Saivism. The song of Andal has 30 verses, which the Vaishnavas use to recite for each of the thirty days of the month of Marhali at one verse a day. The Saiva song contains twenty verses which the Saivas sing on the ten days previous to the Marhali Tiru Adirai and the ten days after. Both the Saints end each verse of their songs with the phrase Empavai, our *pavai.* Both of them refer to the month of Marhali and the pre-dawn bath. The two songs emphasize the bath in the morning. In both we find young girls going to one another's houses in groups, waking up the girls who had not yet woke up and going together to the water front for the bath. There is a lot of humour and banter in ridiculing the girl who had not woke up quickly and the repartee in both cases is interesting. Both the poems pray for rain. The *Tirup-Pavai* song of Andal is part of the Book of Daily Prayers (*Nityanusandhanam* for the Vaishnavas, from the days of Ramanuja. It is a living force today directing them to rise up and rid themselves of the *tamasic* force, the grip of gross matter and ignorance, and advance towards the *satvic* Supreme entity. Krishna is here not a mere play mate of the gopis, though the language is simple and playful. He is the Supreme Being to which all the human souls are brides, bound together by ties of ageless bondage and service, to reach the final culmination of grace. The physical and sensuous aspect of the poem is not forgotten by the Vaishnavas, who celebrate for example, the twenty seventh day as *Kudaravalli,* from the opening lines of the twenty seventh song, 'Kudarai vellum seer Govinda'. This day is celebrated with a festive food offering. The song describes a bond between the Lord and the soul as a relationship that can never be cut away and it depicts the whole as a striving of the soul towards a final celebration with the grace of Vishnu.

O Govinda, renowned as the Vanquisher
Of the foes ! We shall sing of Thy grace
And receive from Thee presents adored by people,
Such as bracelets and armlets, ear rings,

Anklets and other trinkets and new garments,
Plenty of rice and milk, with ghee overflowing
Right down the forearm, and enjoy these
Together, to our hearts' content, — My dear !

Tiru-Empavai

The *Tiru Empavai* of Saint Manikkavacakar coming probably a century later, strikes a more severe and austere note. Here there is no prayer for the things of the world, but a prayer for the flood of grace in which the author and the girls would fain bathe and immerse themselves. The twenty verses end with a description of the Lord, who is beginningless and endless but yet is the beginning and the end of all, and who is the performer of the fivefold functions of creation, protection, dissolution, obscuration and grace, for the benefit of the bonded souls on earth. There is a practice among the Saivas that during the month of Marhali they should sing only the *Tiru-Empavai* and not the rest of the *Tiru-vacakam* of which this forms the seventh poem.

Among both the Saiva and the Vaishnava groups, young girls and boys get up early in the morning, have their bath, sing their respective songs in chorus along the main streets of the villages and the corridors of the temples, and finally witness the early morning *aradana*, before six a.m. and get whatever *prasadam* is distributed. This has been going on for the past one thousand years and is certain to go on to the end of time.

Significance

Apart from the ending as *empavai*, the *pavai* is mentioned by Andal in several of her verses (2, 3, 13), which would suggest that this was indeed a festival intended to worship a form of Sakti (*pavai*-image). There is an arrangement in all the verses which work up from mere fun and frolic to His grace. The first 15 verses are the play, mockery and jeering of the girls who are waking up one another ; the next eight are songs intended to wake up Krishna. Verse 24 is his praise ; the next five are a prayer for him to grant them all the good things of

life, and ultimately to take them all into his fold and service while the last is the invoking of grace even on all those who recite the verses.

The *pavai* poem of St. Manikkavacakar is cast in a different mould. At the outset it may be seen that all the verses deal with actual bathing. The first eight verses deal with the waking up of the girls with the usual banter and humour. Two verses pray that only Siva's servants should be their husbands (9 and 19). Verse 14 is fully in praise of Sakti, justifying the view that the poems are a festival and worship of a form of Sakti. The prayer for rain is couched in similar words in the two poems. The other verses speak of Siva's all pervasiue, self-luminous, all merciful nature, and end up with the mention of His fivefold functions whose main purpose is the redemption of the souls that are steeped in darkness.

Rising up early before dawn and worshipping God as Siva or Vishnu is a feature common to both. Andal mentions the saffron robed Siva bhaktas who hasten to their temples to open the gates and perform worship. It is worthy of note that the chief festivals for Saivism and Vaishnavism, the Ardra Darsana and the Vaikuntha Ekadasi occur in this month.

The earth takes one year of twelve months to go round the sun. This we call in Indian reckoning the time taken by the sun to travel from the Tropic of Capricorn (traditionally the first of Thai) to the Tropic of Cancer in the north, a period of six months, Thai to Ani, and back from the Tropic of Cancer (the first of Adi) to Capricorn. The two mevements are called *ayanam* and these, are respectively the *Uttarayanam* (journey tothe North) and the *Dakshinayam* (journey to the South) respectively, each being a period of six months. The Uttarayana is the time of day for the devas while the Dakshinayana is the time of night for them. Naturally the daytime is more important and hence the special virtue attached to Uttarayanam and its first day, the first of Thai. Now Marhali is the last of the six months, the night, and during this month the devas wake up from their sleep. It is the dawn hour and hence its imporrance among all the months. The end of Marhali ushers in the Uttarayanam.

ARDRA DARSANA-
THE COSMIC DANCE OF NATARAJA

The greatest temple festival for all the Saivas is the Dance of Lord Nataraja in Chidambaram on the Ardra day in the Tamil month of Marhali (December-January). The asterism *ardra orionis* is in the north eastern corner of the constellation of *Orion*. The *ardra* day usually occurs in conjunction with the full moon in this month. In popular parlance, the festival is called the *Marhali-Tiruvadirai* (*Adirai* is the Tamil form of *Ardra*). Even today, thousands of devotees throng the city from all over India, from distant overseas countries like Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore etc., braving all travel discomforts and the political ordeals of passport and visa to witness the dance of Nataraja here. There must be something vitally appealing to people at all levels for them to be attracted as if by a mystic magnet to this place on this day. The mystic magnet is Nataraja, the King of Dance, the Cosmic Dancer.

The Concept of Nataraja

The whole universe is in motion. After the disintegration of the atom was accomplished, scientists have come to learn that there is one supreme source of energy, which activates everything in the universe. On the bombardment of the atom, it was discovered that there was a nucleus of matter within the atom which was surrounded by dynamic particles of energy which were always revolving with high velocity. It is this motion which is responsible for all activity. In the sphere of space, we have seen how space travel has been made possible by releasing the energy compressed within the atom. The eternal movement of heavenly bodies, not only of the solar system but of the many more stellar systems of which this is only one, is possible only because of this energy. Our ancienct forefathers have given this supreme dynamic power the name of God and have called this aspect of God as Nataraja, the Cosmic Dancer, whose dance makes the heavenly bodies go round in an apparently mad rush but extraordinarily organised and controlled by a super-human Law. The form of Nataraja thus conceived is both artistic and divinely functional.

The form of Nataraja has been hailed as the highest concept of art, even superior to the Greek concepts, by eminent connoisseurs like Lord Rothenstein. Chidambaram is *the* shrine of Nataraja. Chidambaram is the Jnana-akasa, the place of Cosmic Consciousness.

The form of Nataraja is a unique concept, which is a rare contribution of Tamilnad to the world concepts of art, form, religion and philosophy. Siva's various modes of dance are represented in the many panels of the Chola temple at Tanjavur and on the sides of the entrance at the gopuras in the Chidambaram temple. They are a marvel of art depiction, study of which will be most rewarding but can never be exhausted.

Lord Nataraja is installed in bronze in a separate hall in all the Siva temples in front of the sanctum, facing south. Of the many forms of Nataraja, three are important. One is the *Chatura Tandava* where He does not lift any foot; probably the right is just about to be lifted. Some times there is no Muyalaka under His foot. This is very rarely met with in a few temples. The second is the *Urdhva Tandava,* where He fully lifts up the right foot, verfically up. This is the pose in Tiru Alankadu near Madras, where Karaikkal ammai is having an eternal vision of the Lord's dance. This form is familar in many other temples also, as for example in the Kailasanatha temple of Kanchipuram. There is also a separate hall for this form of Nataraja in an outer corridor to the south of the main Nataraja shrine in Chidambaram, where the image is in stone.

But the greatest is the form known as the *Ananda Tandava* form which is the Nataraja of Chidambaram and which has been universally adopted in all the Siva temples of Tamilnadu. It is *Pancha Kritya dance* whose mystic symbolism embodies all the philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta. It is this form which has been sung by all the Saiva saints through the centuries and the volume of devotional literature that has grown round this Nataraja is almost limitless. The entire Chola dynasty through more than four centuries owed its allegiance to this Nataraja. Also, the later Vijayanagar dynasty, the Nayak rulers and many others had been inspired by this Ananda Tandava murti.

The tandavas of Nataraja are the following seven: Ananda tandava, Sandhya tandava, Uma tandava, Gowri tandava, Kali tandava, Tiripura tandava and Samhara tandava. Urdhva tandavam is said to be a variant of sandhya tandavam.

The Festival

The Ardra *dursana* festival of Nataraja at Chidambaram is a ten day festival Ten days earlier, on the first day, there is a flag hoisting in the temple. Every day there is a festival culminating on the nineth when Nataraja, the presiding deity in the temple, is taken out in procession along the four main streets of the eity in a gaily and artistically but traditionally decorated car. The car is then drawn along the streets by thousands of devotees and finally brought to its original place in the evening. In recent years streets had been metalled and later macadamized, and it is no doubt easy today for a few hundred people to draw the car. But it was not so easy six decades ago when the streets were all mud roads and when the car would not move. Often it would get stuck up ln the mud and slush. In those days it required several thousands of people to draw the car by the two ropes attached to it in front. Usually five chariots are drawn round - those of Lord Nataraja, of His consort Sakti Sivakamasundari, of Ganesa, of Subrahmanya and of Chandesa. That of Nataraja is the biggest and the others aremuch smaller. These five are the Pancha murti in Saiva worship.

After the car returns to its place (or stand as it is called). Nataraja is carried into the temple and placed in the *Sabha* in the Thousand Pillared Hall. Early next morning, even by 3 a.m. an *abhishekam* commences. More than a hundred thousand people take turns in witnessing the *abhisheka*. Then there is the *alankara*, decking the form of Nataraja with jewels and flowers. The form thus decked is a glorious sight to see. Then, at an auspicious moment, Nataraja is carried out into the open corridor, before entering the temple. As He is descendsng the steps of the Hall, the sound of *Harohara* from a hundred thousand pairs of lips and hearts in unison rends the air. He is then taken near the temple entrance, brought back to the steps and then to

the entrance and so on, thrice. This is the Dance or the symbol of the Dance of Nataraja, the *Anantha Tandavam*, the Dance of Bliss. Thousands upon thousands in the crowd have lived only for this moment. The form of Nataraja is also open at the back without being covered with cloth or flower, and the vision of Nataraja at the back as well as at the front is a glorious sight for the multitude to treasure for life. As Nataraja enters the temple, a few remain to have a *darsan* of Nataraja again at the *Chit-sabha* while most leave the place, to come later at leisure and have the *darsan*.

Significance

It is remarkable that only two of the stars in the list of 27 have the Tamil prefix *tiru* (celebrated) along with their names; they are Tiru Adirai (Ardra) sacred to Siva, and Tiru-Onam (Sravanam) sacred to Vishnu. Vishnu is said to have been born (incarnated) on Tiruvonam day, but Ardra is said to be just Siva's favourite star. St Appar says that He is fond of Ardra (Adirainal uhandanum). When St. Appar returns to Tirup-puhalur from Tiru Arur after witnessing the Ardra festival there, St. Jnanasambandhar meets him and asks him about Tiru Arur. Appar goes into raptures in describing the glory and grandeur of the festival and declares that the whole world without any exception celebrates the Ardra of Tiru Arur.

In Saiva hagiology, Ardra has great significance. Sekkilar who is usually silent about the natal star of all the saints says in pious and loving detail that the Ardra was the birth star of the child Jnanasambandhar. Again, in the life or Narasinga Munai-araiyar a royal Saiva saint who brought up St. Sundaramurti, he says that he invariably performed Siva puja on the Ardra day and distributed liberally one hundred pieces of gold to the Siva bhaktas.

Esoterically also, the festival is considered to symbolize the performance the five-fold functions done by Lord Siva for uplifting all souls. The *abhisheka* of Nataraja in the thousand pillared hall is a great event; it denotes creation (*srishti*). The food offering on the occasion is preservation (*stithi*). Sandal in the

name of Krishna gandam is smeared on Him: this is dissolution *(samhara)*. A black cow is brought before Him for His darsan; and this is obscuration (*tirobhava*), lastly the dipa-aradhana which all people witness is *anugraha* (Grace).

The inner chamber in which the image of Nataraja is kept for worship is known as the Chit-sabha (the Hall of Intelligence): the hall in front is known as the Kanaka sabha, the Golden hall where bhaktas stand and worship. In the day previous to the Ardra, Nataraja goes out of the Chit sabha to give a darsan to all human beings: this symbolizes creation. He ties an amulet on his arm, a *raksha bandhan*; this is preservation, Smearing of the sandal, krishna gandam is dissolution. He is dressed in white which symbolizes obscuration. Lastly, His procession from the thousand pillared hall to the Chitsabha is *anugraha*, grace.

Unlike the Sivalinga in any temple for whom *abhisheka is* performed several times a day, all the days of the year, only six *abhishekas* are performed in a year for Nataraja anywhere. The most famous and elaborate one is the Ardra of Marhali; this symbolizes the dawn hour (*ushatkala*) for Him. The next *abhisheka* is on the *chaturdasi* day (fourteenth) in the bright fortnight of Masi, which symbolizes morning for Him. *Tiruvona nakshatra abhisheka* in the month of Chitrai is His noon. The next is Ani Tiru Manjanam, on the day of the Uttira nakshatra in the month of Ani. This is also celebrated with great enthusiasm in a grand manner (vide page 83); this symbolizes the afternoon and *prodosha kala*. The *abhisheka* on the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight in Avani is His evening. And lastly the *abhisheka* on the fourteenth of the bright fortnight of Purttasi is His midnight.

The Symbol of Lord Nataraja

God of popular religion is the Absolute of metaphysics and the Supreme One of philosophy. That God cannot be comprehended by sensory perception. The eyes cannot see Him, the ear cannot hear Him, the nose cannot smell Him, the tongue

cannot taste Him and the sense of touch cannot touch Him, the mind that functions only through those senses cannot naturally realise Him. If he is then so incomprehensible externally, how then are we to see him, or undersrand Him, praise Him or go to Him for succour? All religions have devised various means for such an understanding. The Saivism of South India has devised an artistic form for God, to which all human devotion can be directed. That form is Nataraja: the term means the Supreme Dancer.

Now, we shall have a look at the form of Nataraja. Just to implant the idea of super-human power, Nataraja has been given four arms. This is a general symbolic feature in all Indian iconography. Additional hands mean simply power. The right foot of Nataraja is planted on a little demon. The left is lifted and held across it. Of the four arms, the right back arm holds a little drum and the left back arm holds a little fire. The right forward arm is just held up, palm in front, in the pose of benediction or granting solace. The left forward arm is just held in a sweep. At the back of the form of Nataraja there is a circular arc and on it there are 51 little flames. All these are not mere parts of the form, but are conceived with a definte philosophic connotation.

The large round arc denotes the entire universe. Nataraja does not dance in any one particular place. But the entire cosmos is the stage on which He performs His unceasing Dance. Now the drum sounds when He dances and produces the primordial sound 'OM'. This is known in other mythologies also as the music of the spheres. Sound was created first and from the subtle sound, gross matter slowly condensed itself. Now again, the sound which emanates from the drum is not any meaningless noise, but the first letters, vowels and consonants which are considered to be the alphabets in Sanskrit. The 51 little flames on the outer edge of the arc represents those 51 sounds. From sounds speech emanated, and from speech knowledge. In short the sounding of the drum is symbolic of creation.

Next we see the right forward palm facing us. It is symbolic of the Supreme Power's nourishment and protection given to

the subjects created. The hand so held signifies peace and that stands for the orderly preservation and sustenance of the universe.

Now the fire in the left backward arm denotes naturally destruction. This signifies the destruction or dissolution of the whole universe, consisting of not only matter but also of all living beings. In short, it symbolises what others call the Deluge. The Saiva concept is that during innumerable births the soul does certain acts, reaps the fruits of those acts and then the body dies and then again the soul is reborn; it again commits acts and so on. The cycle goes on endlesely. When God finds that some rest is necessary for the soul from this cycle of birth, activity and death, He causes this Deluge. Souls are then given some rest. Then again they are reborn. Death does not mean destruction. It only means rest before another course of birth and activity starts.

The planted right foot stands on a demon. The demon is symbolic of the individual's ego and ignorance. But for this ego, the soul can simply surrender itself to the Almighty or God and be happy in the peace and bliss resulting therefrom. The ego obstructs such a surrender. It is personified here as a demon called *Muyalaka* which the Lord tramples down. Once this is snuffed out, the soul can be free to realise its goal of joy and oneness with God.

Lastly, we have the lifted left foot. This is held in a free pose of poise and ease. This is symbolic of the Lord's Grace. This is unconditional mercy shown to the soul. Grace is always spoken of as the Foot of the Lord and the liberated soul is said to take its eternal rest in Grace, that is, under the lifted Foot. This is the culmination in the Saiva religion, of the the spiritual effort of the individual, that is, to rest under the Feet of the Lord, to abide in His Mercy and Grace. This is an eternal bliss from which there is no return, and there are no more births and no more deaths.

Nataraja may be seen to have a tender smile on his countenance. This is symbolic of his welcome even to the errant soul

which may seek shelter under His Grace and his unconditional mercy.

This in short is the form of Nataraja. He creates the world, the instruments for experience, the objects for experience, and the very experience itself, for the souls. Then he gives them protection and ultimately He resolves the entire universe. In accordance with the acts done by the individual, his intellect is clouded and is obscured. Lastly, at the right moment, when through successive births, the soul has evolved spiritually, the conferment of Grace occurs. These are the five functions of Nataraja and they are called in Saivism, Creation, Preservation, Dissolution, Obscuration and Conferment of Grace. The Dance of Nataraja is the performance of these five fold functions.

The form of Nataraja is the most important in all the temples. Nataraja, the Supreme, is Siva. He is the Formless, the Absolute, the One. The form of Nataraja is conceived as a Form of God so that the human mind can grasp it, comprehend it and work out its own salvation through this conprehension of God's Grace. It should be clearly understood that Siva, the Supreme Being, has no form.

Another important point. There is no external God. God exists in the temple, only for him who realises Him as the One residing and dancing in the innermost recesses of His own heart. Once this understanding comes to him, he will comprehend the Dance of Nataraja, both in the microcosm and in the macrocosm, the infinitesimal and the infinite. Nataraja dances in the heart and dances in the universe. The wise and the enlightened realise this and give themselves up to God. This is the significance of the Dance of Nataraja.

The Dance

The first dance of Nataraja was performed at Chidambaram for the sake of two sages, Vyagrapada and Patanjali. Vyagrapada desired to be able to climb trees and gather flowers for the

Lord's worship and at his request was given the feet and claws of a tiger to help him in climbing (*vyagra* tiger, *pada* feet). Patanjali is the serpent Adisesha, couch of Vishnu. The dance performed for their sake is now there for the mortals to see, worship and get redeemed. The Dance of Nataraja and His form are symbolic of the many concepts of Saiva Siddhanta relating to the *Panchakshara* and the five-fold function of creation, preservation, dissolution, obscuration and grace.

There are many dance halls situated in different places. The important are the following. Chidambaram is the golden hall; Madurai is the silver hall (Rajatasebha); Tirunelveli is the copper hall (Tamra sabha): Tiruk-kutralam is the picture hall (chitra sabha) and Tiruvalamkadu is the gem-hall (Ratna sabha).

The Nandanar Legend

The legends connected with Nataraja are legion. A few deserve mention here. Nandan was a harijan farmer of a village near *Tirup-Pungur* in modern Tanjavur district. He was worshipping Siva at Tirup-Pungur, standing at some distance from the entrance. Nandi (here the bull) was seated in front, obscuring Nanda's direct vision of Siva. By Divine will, Nandi moved to its right and Nandan was able to see the form of the Siva lingam in the *sanctum* directly and worship it.

A *darsan* of Nataraja at Chidambaram is the dream of every devout Hindu of South India, and naturally Nandan also desired to go and have a darsan there. He persuaded his master to permit him to go. He came here and Nataraja bade his priests to go and bring him to His Presence. Nanda came to the Presence and overcome by the supreme ecstasy of the experience, he melted away in the Lord. He is one of the canonised saints of Saivism. The legend of Nanda might have taken place in the years B. C. In our own time Mahatma Gandhi, paying homage to him, called Nanda the *First Satyagrahi.*

Saint Manikkavacakar, who sang *Tiruvacakam* the most moving outpourings of the heart on Siva attained beatitude here in this shrine. A host of other saints and devotees had lived here and attained bliss.

The Sendanar Legend and the Kali Offering

The dance of Nataraja on this day is celebrated in Chidambaram and in all the Siva temples in Tamilnad at about mid-day. All the Saivas attend the function for worship and return home for their first meal for the day. A particular dish called Tiru Adiraik-kali is prepared and offered to Nataraja on this day. This consists now of rice and jaggery with coconut chips and ghee. A moving legend is associated with the offering of this kali.

In the middle of the nineth century in the reign of the Chola monarch Gandaraditta (950-957 A.D.) there was a harijan *bhakta* by name Sendan living on the outskirts of Chidambaram, eking out his livelihood as a woodcutter. On the day previous to the car festival, it was raining very heavily and the woodcutter could not chop off much dry wood and so was unable to get a good price. He was able to purchase only ragi (considered an inferior grain) and not rice for his food. So he made a sort of gruel out of this as offering to Nataraja in his home. Humble though he be, his devotion was recognized by Nataraja, who in order to honour him, came to his hut as a mendicant and was given this humble fare. He ate well and took off what was left in the house saying that he wanted it for the next meal!

Opening the temple early the next morning, the *Dikshitas* (temple priests at Chidambaram) found this gruel or *kali* strewn all around the *Chit sabha* and the *Kanaka sabha*. This was considered an act of sacrilege and duly reported to the king who was in the city. Meanwhile the king was also unhappy because he did not hear the tinkling of the bells on Nataraja's feet that evening in his *puja*, which he usually used to hear, to tell him that Nataraja had accepted his puja. The Lord appeared in his dream and told him that He had been to the hut of Sendan to partake of his *kali*. The poor unknown Sendan was duly honoured and in order to move the car of Nataraja along the city streets, he was also bidden by the Lord to sing a *pallandu* song. (*Pallandu* is a song of benediction on the Lord Himself, blessing Him to rule over the land for ever and ever.

This he did and from that day, the offering of the kali to Nataraja and the singing of the *pallandu* song have become the rule in every temple and in every home.

The Call of Nataraja

Both the *Vaikunta Ekadasi* in honour of Vishnu and the *Ardra Darsanam* in honour of Siva (as Nataraja) signify an integration in the two *Vaidika* religions, Saivism and Vaishnavism. Both the festivals occur in the Tamil month of *Marhali.* This month has been declared to be his favourite month by Sri Krishna in the *Gita 'masanam margasirsho asmi'*. Members of both the sects get up early in the morning before day break, have a good bath, and attend the pre-dawn temple service. Songs celebrating this month have been sung in their religions known as '*Pavaip pattu*' (*Tirup pavai and Tiru Empavai*) by the canonised saints Andal and Manikkavacakar. Legends say that the two melted away in the form of Lord Ranganatha of the Vaishnavas' *Koil*. Sri Rangam and in the form of Nataraja at the Saiva's *Koil*, Chidambaram. The traditions originated in the land several millennia ago and were perpetuated by these two saints in the 8th and the 9th centuries. The *pavai* songs sung by them are some of the richest legacy of the Tamils.

The call of Lord Nataraja will continue to attract the devotees as long as there is a throb in the heart and as long as the electron revolves in the atom.

The Lord pervades everything in the universe. Yet, just as He is considered to be present in the Sivalingam in the sanctum and the Nataraja form in the Sabha, He is also identified with the *Ardra* star, although He abides in all the heavenly bodies. This concept is mentioned by all the Saiva acharyas. The following is the invocatory verse of *Muttollayiram*, which is to that effect;

The stars, the moon, the sun - all these
He created in times of yore.
Yet people in this world girt by the seas,
Would fain call him,
He of the Ardra, He of the Ardra.

The *ardra* as His favourite star has been men'ioned by all the canon singers and they also refer to the *ardra* festival. Jnanasambandhar makes a special mention of it, in his song intended to bring back to life the young girl Poompavai at Mayilappur.

Literature

Literature on Chidambaram is vast. The songs sung by the Saiva acharyas are many. A major part of the *Tiruvisaippa* songs are on Nataraja here. Sekkilar sang his *Periya puranam* here. *Tirukkalitruppadiyar* a Saiva scriptural work composed by Tiruk-Kadavur Uyyavanda devanayanar was lifted by the stone elephant on the steps of the *Chit sabha* and placed at Nataraja's feet. *Puranams* by Umapati Sivam, Purana Tirumalai nathar and Sabapathi Navalar have been written for the place in the 14th, 16th and 19th centuries respectively. All the great music composers have sung *kirttanas* and *padam* in praise of Nataraja. The soul melting kirttanams and padams of Muthu Tandavar and Marimutha pallai on Natarja are most popular.

The earliest mention of the Ardra festival is probably the mention in the *Paripadal*. It mentions that in the cold month of Marhali when the sun is not very severe, the brahmins, deeply read in the scriptures, commence the festival.

VAIKUNTHA EKADASI

The most important among all the annual festive celebrations in Vaishnavism is the Vaikuntha Ekadasi, celebrated on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight of the Tamil month of Marhali (December-January). It is principally a day of fasting and keeping awake at night. The belief was that if one went without any food for the day and night and also kept awake the whole of that night, going and worshipping Vishnu in the temple, he is certain to gain admission to Vaikuntha, which is the abode of Lord Vishnu, and gaining which is the ultimate aim of all Vishnu bhaktas.

Ekadasi, the eleventh day, normally occurs twice a month but this particular ekadasi is held sacred on account of several legends. It is also called the *Mukkodi Ekadasi*, equivalent to three crores of ekadasis.

Devout people observe the fast and *vrata* very scrupulously and, on the early morning of the next day, go to the temple to have a darsan of Lord Vishnu and offer worship. There is a special entrance to the Lord's presence in important temples which is generally closed all through the year and opened for the going in and coming out for the Lord's image on the twelve days, beginning from the first day of the bright fortnight in the month of Marhali. This is called the *svarga vasal* (gateway to Heaven). It is opened for the devotees on the morning for admission, as entry now signifies entry into Vaikuntha itself.

The Mahabharata Legend

After entry and worship, they return home for the first meal after about fortytwo hours. They are specially enjoined to have a dish of *agatti* leaves (the edible *sesbania*) on account of a legend from the Mahabharata. After the evil Duryodhana had driven away the Pandavas to the forest, he planned to ruin them further. He invited Sage Durvasa, notorious for his hot temper and quick unforgiving curses, pleased him with his hospitality and entertainment, and sent him to the Pandavas in the forest at an untimely hour, so that when the sage arrived at their place in hunger they would not be in a position to feed him properly and thereby would incur his curses. The sage did go there and the Pandavas were in the same predicament ; they had no food to serve him. Draupadi then prayed to Krishna to save them from the wrath of the unreasonable Durvasa. Krishna found a piece of the cooked *sesbania* left sticking to the vessel in which their food was earlier prepared and with it he converted the vessel into an *akshaya patra*, one which supplied an infinite and never ending quantity of good food. Durvasa ate this good food to his heart's centent and went away blessing the Pandavas. That day happened to be the *dvadasi*, the day after *ekadasi* and from that day the habit of taking a *sesbania* preparation on *dvadasi* to break the fast of *ekadasi* became a religious practice.

This legend apart, there is a nutritional value attached to the sesbania leaf. It is rich in A vitamin and is a good corrective even today for many deficiencies of vision. Hence the partaking of the green leaf is attended with salutary nutritional effects.

The Saivas are generally very liberal and tolerant in their religious outlook. Many of them also rigidly observe this Ekadasi fasting.

The Murasura Legend

There are many legends connectedwith this fesival. There was an asura named Mura, who as was usual with the asuras of his tribe, was harassing the mortals and the celestials. Lord Vishhu came to this earth on this particular day for destroying him. As Mura had considerable powers accrued in him through innumerable penances, Vishnu's fight also went on for quite a long period. At some stage he felt tired and rested in a cave. Taking this as a sign of real weakness, Mura went in to carry on his fight. At that moment, an angel of exquisite beauty emanated from the form of Vishnu, smiled at the asura on which he approached her to take liberties with her. But with a hard breathing of '*hum*' she reduced him to ashes. Vishnu recovered from his rest and seeing what had happened, called her *Ekadasi*. He was happy at her performance and promised her that he would admit into Vaikuntha those who worshipped Him with due fasting on this day. Thus came into existence the first *ekadasi vrata*. The day on which Vishnu came to the earth for the destruction of Mura and the day on which the angel actually reduced him to ashes are said to be this Vaikuntha Ekadasi day. The traditional three crores of devas also came to the earth with Vishnu and so the name *Mukkodi Ekadasi*.

The Rukmangada Legend

Another legend relates how king Rukumangada observed this *vrata* and attained *moksha*. He was the ruler of Ayodhya. He had grown a flower garden of rare and fragrant flowers which he was using for the temple worship. Indra, Lord of the

celestials, happened to see them and had them stealthily taken away by his cetestial nymphs from the king's garden. When the king threatened the gardeners with severe punishment unless they brought him the thief, they brought him one person whom they found in the garden.

This person was however the rishi Jabali who was seated in the beautiful garden in yogic *samadhi*. When the king saw him, he realised his men's mistake, and apologized to him. This sage was of a kind disposition unlike Durvasa. He forgave the king and told him that if he he grew some melon creepers in the garden the thief would get entangled in the creeping vine and could be caught. The king did so and one of the nymphs was accordingly caught by the melon vines, with the flowers. When the king asked her, she confessed to stealing the flowers and said that as she was caught by the mortals she could no longer go to the celestial region. The only power that could send her there was the merit accruing from the *ekadasi vrata*. But no one had then heard of it in the city. There was at that time a woman in the city, a nurse in the palace who had fasted on the *ekadasi* day owing to a quarrel, had not slept for the night, and had her food only the next morning. So she had unknowingly gone through the full *vrata* and earned the merit therefrom. When she gave that merit to the nymph, she was able to return to the celestial regions. The king thereupon ordered the vrata to be observed by everyone in his land. This resulted in the over-population of the heavens and the de-population of the nether world. Urvasi, the celebrated celestial nymph, was thereupon sent to Rukmangada to make him forget the vrata. She stayed with him on condition that he followed all her wishes. Relinquishing the kingdom to his son Dharmangada, the king was enjoying life with her. One morning when he was with her, the city drums sounded the time of the commencement of the festival that day. To celebrate it, he want away from her. He told her that he was prepared to to do anything except stopping the vrata. She took him at his word and asked him to cut off the head of his son. He did so. The devas appeared before him to tell him that all this was merely a test for his steadfastness in adhering to the *vrata* and was only intended to reveal its glory to the world. Such is the greatness of the *ekadasi vrata*.

Recitation of Nalayiram

The *Nalayira prabandham* in the Tamil language is the Veda for the Vaishnavas. During a period of ten days prior to this day and another ten days after this day, the recitation of the Nalaylram is made before Sri Ranganatha at Sri Rangam and it is called the *Adhyayana utsava*. On some of the days, the Arayar, there, a privileged class of temple priests, perform a kind of dance for the Tiruvaymoli of Nammalvar. The festival thus coincides with a celebration calculated to glorify the many Alvars' songs in Tamilnad.

Inscriptional records indicate that the Chola monarchs had made grants to temples for feeding brahmins on this occasion.

THE BHOGI PANDIHAI

Occurrence

The Pongal festival consists of a festivity covering four consecutive days. The Bhogi is the first of the four days. Pongal proper is on the first of the Tamil month of *Thai* and Bhogi is a day earlier, on the last day of the previous month. *Margali* in the Tamil calender.

Signifcance

The term bhogi implies the enjoyment of pleasures. Bhogi is Indra, the Lord of the celestials and the giver of rain. This day was the famous Indra vila, festival of Indra celebrated in *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimekhalai*. This was originally celebrated in the month of Chitrai when the asterism *Chitrai* was ascendant. The legend is that the Chola Emperor, Musukunda started it under the orders of sage Agastya to celebrate Indra for the welfare of the people. There was a prophecy that when the Cholas forgot to observe the festival in any particular year, the sea tides would overrun the land and the capital city of Puhar (Kaverippattinam), where the festival was celebrated with great rejoicing, would be washed away. It is said that this was a 27 day festival. Not only Indra, but all the other deities were

elaborately worshipped there. The entire population took part in the festivities. This is also mentioned by Valmiki and Kalidasa. An important feature of the festival was the sea bath and sports and dances etc. on the sea shore. Once, in the days of King Nedumudik-killi, the city failed to celebrate the festival, because the king had lost his son in the sea and in his search for the lost child, he forgot to order the celebration. If indeed this legend were true, the people also had forgotten the day of the celebration. We find that a considerable period later, the people began celebrating the festival not on Chitrai of Chitrai but on the last day of Marhali, which continues to this day.

Observance

The whole day is spent in internal decorations like *kolam* and festoons. In the early morning all people have usually an oil bath. At noon time, a *puja* is made to Indra. He is invoked on a pinch of turmeric, with the lamp on either side, the usual five faced *kuthuvilakku*, and a sumptous offering of cooked rice is presented to him. This is distributed to the labour class people of the village including village artisans. Usually *vadai-payasam* is served on this day.

The evening is an occasion for presents. All the dependent class people of the village - the agricultural labourers, the carpenter, blacksmith, the barber, washerman, sweeper, cobbler, public drummer, the village watchmen etc. - all get a present of the newly harvested paddy, according to the service rendered by the receiver and the capaclty of the giver, in large or small quantities; the quantity varies from one Madras measure to four. Some get a few balls of jaggery and a full length piece of sugarcane. In the olden days when pounding or dehusking of paddy was done in every house, rice obtained from this paddy and the balls of jaggery were used for cooking the pongal in milk on the *pongal* and the *mattuppongal* days.

Special Features

In the physio-graphical classification of the land in the Tamil literary tradition, Indra has been hailed for more than two thousand years as the Lord of the pastoral regions (*marudam*)

and so it is appropriate that the pastoral festival *pongal* begins by celebrating him. The whole day is se' apart for a general scrubbing and cleaning cf all living quarters. Many days earlier the whole washing and colour-washing of all buildings is taken up. A bonfire is lit in which all that is old and useless is cast away and burnt - old mats, brooms, winnows, brushes and baskets etc. Broken pots and anything broken and useless are thrown away and replaced by new things. Children naturally take great delight in feeding the fire with as many discarded things as they can lay their hands on. This symbolizes the ushering in on the next day of the Pongal day which commences the *Uttarayana,* the day of happiness and rejoicing for all.

Legends

The legend of Krishna lifting up the Govardhana giri is attached to this festival, but this seems doubtful. Once the cowherds, bold under the stewardship of Krishna, would not perform the worship of Indra. He was angry and so showered a rain of stones and pebbles on the cowherds and their cattle. Krishna protected them from the shower by holding up the Govardhana hill standing nearby, with his little finger, and asked the cowherds to remain in its shelter. They did so, Indra felt humiliated and prayed for forgiveness from Krishna. Thereupon Krishna restored the usual worship of Indra. The lifting up of the hill is a great feat of Krishna celebrated in all *puranas* and the *Nalayira prabandham,* the Vaishnava canon.

Modern research writers would say that the Govardhana hill incident in the story of Krishna symbolizes the dethronement of the chief Vedic God Indra from his lofty pedestal and the enthronement in the pantheon of Krishna, a new avatar of Vishnu.

Bhogi is the same as the *Lohri* festival celebrated by the people of the Punjab at about the same period. The last day of their month of *Poh* (Pushya) and the bonfire is the important feature. The fire is lit in the evening. Young boys go round

singing songs and collecting firewood. When the fire is lit, men and women go round the fire and pour their offerings into it.

In the Andhra areas, the Bhogi is treated as a *Gopi* festival. They also observe an oil bath and declare that 'the bhogi pestilence has now vanished'. Every morning in the whole month, they adorn the house front with *kolam,* place three balls of cow dung in its centre and decorate it with flowers; the these are considered to represent the cow (go-mata), Krishna and the Govardhana hill. They sing many *goppi-songs* round the symbols and have a celebration for six days at the end of which they consign these to a river.

10. THAI

THE PONGAL FESTIVAL

The *Pongal* festival in Tamilnad is the one celebration today which yet preserves one of the richest traditions of mankind from the remote past. It is a day of thanksgiving to the Supreme Benevolent Power which is beyond all human ken. To the city dweller of the present day, pongal is merely a ritual of an exchange of formal paper greetings, and to the city workman it is merely the occasion for a few days of absence from work with wages and perhaps for the putting on of new clothes. But to the villager today, it is more meaningful and productive of more deep rooted joy.

Occurrence

Of the two half years *Uttaraynna* (January 15 to July 15) and *Dakshinayana* (July 15 to January 15), the Uttarayana is considered to be meritorious while the other is not. Dakshinayana, the journey of the sun from the north to the south, from the Cancer to the Capricorn, is generally considered not so very auspicious and so the first day when the sun *turns back* on its journey to the *north* is considered auspicious. Even death may not take place in the Dakshinayana, but it will be good if it can happen in the Uttarayana. This concept is fed by such epic stories as that of Bhishma the grand old royal warrior sage of the Mahabharata story, who mortally wounded by Arjuna's arrow, lying on a bed of arrows on the battle field of Kurukshetra, did not give up his life at once, but held his ebbing life by sheer force of will and strength of the spirit, waiting for the advent of Uttarayana, to give it up.

The Pongal day on the first of Uttarayana, is called the *Makara Sankranti* or simply the *Sankranti* day, on which the sun passes from the nineth sign *(rasi)* of the Zodiac to the tenth sign the *Makara* (known as the month of *Thai* in Tamil).

The day was specially auspicious to temple worship and we have epigraphical records of endowments made for performing special *abhisheka* to Siva on the Uttarayana Sankranti day.

This day is celebrated by all people as the most auspicious. On this day the sun turns back from the southern most point. At this point he is at the longest distance from the earth and from the part of it which corresponds to the South of India. Hence the heat received by this part from the sun is least now and we experience a spell of cold. His retraciing his steps northward signifies the dispelling of the cold and the ushering in of greater light and warmth. The first day of this month symbolizes this introduction of warmth and no wonder it is welcomed with great acclaim.

The pongal festival in Tamil Nadu consists of a four day celebration. It celebrates Indra the Lord of *Marutam*, Surya Sun God as the giver of all bounty, and the Cow as man's greatest helper through the ages, on the first three days respectively. On the days of *pongal* and *mattup-pongal*, the entire home is decorated with *kolam*. During the previous month of Marhali, mele flowers of the pumpkin family are placed on the *kolam* drawn in front of the house every morning as a decoration. These decorative flowers are collected together, mixed with cowdung and dried each day to be used as fuel for cooking the food offering on the pongal day.

There is a proverb that *Thai* always helps people to find the way out ; for the cultivator, for the indebted, for the unemployed, for maids to be married, and many more, Thai offers solutions. This only signifies the relative affluence in which the month places every one and hence every one looks forward to the dawn of *Thai* with joy and satisfaction.

Significance

Parents remember their daughters, and brothers remember their sisters, and send them not paper greetings, but presents of some of the good things of life and try to light up their homes. Women folk today in rural Tamilnadu remember on

this occasion the homes of their birth with joy and pride. It is well to remember here in the context of ths International Women's Year which had just now come to a close, that it is the women who are given presents, and nowhere men, on this occasion of the happy pongal.

The pongal festival takes its name from the Tamil root *pongu*, to cook, boil over and overflow. *Pongal* is the verbal noun from *pongu*. When newly harvested rice is cooked in a mud pot, over an open fire in the yard made in a newly formed oven in brick, it boils over and this is called *pongal*. The entire festival takes its name from this. Figuratively it is to swell up with joy. On this day, the rice which is boiled in milk, boils up and overflows : people take it as a good augury ; women and children shout *pongalo pongal* and the festival itself takes its name from this feature. The season is also one when every rural household is really swelling with joy and happiness born out of the satisfaction of having produced real wealth and so the name *pongal* is doubly appropriate.

Observance

The pongal celebration is the most important and meaningful. The sun god is invoked on the traditional lamp and a *puja* is offered. The number of the lamps increases with the number of *(sumangili)* ladies in the household. Whatever is considered the best in the year's harvest is offered to the sun god. Newly harvested rice is cooked in milk on a new mud pot and offered on plaintain leaves, numbering five, seven, nine etc. Sugar cane with the foliage, ginger and turmeric with the stem and leaves are offered. The mud pot is decorated by tying the ginger and turmeric stalks with the rhizomes round its neck. Sacred ash marks are placed on the pot. The offerings of food laid out on the plantain leaves are distributed again to the labourers and the village artisans. Cane represents the best of the sweet produce; turmeric is always a symbol of auspiciousness. Sugar rice, cooked in milk with sugar or jaggery, is served out on the leaves with a plentiful addition of ghee, slices of the cocount kernel and plantain fruils. On this occasion, rice is cooked with the correct quantity of water and

no water is filtered out. This kind of rice-cooking is also known as *pongal* as against the now normal *vadittal*. Canes and plantain fruits are in great demand on this day. One or two lamps are lighted with ghee. It is a matter of pride for the ladies that the ghee and the lamp wick are given to them to be lighted by their father or brother. The whole cooking as well as the puja are done in an open central yard of the house, to signify that the worship and the offering is direct to the sun god. The sun is the giver of life to the plants, animals and the humans. Through the whole year he had benevolently showered his kindness on the labours of the tiller and crowned his efforts with a rich produce. Hence the pongal puja done to the sun is a kind of thanksgiving to the Almighty, by whatever name different religions may call him, through the form of the Sun.

The Almighty cannot be seen or grasped by the senses. Man sees His glory and benev lence through the sun which is in a sense His visible form. All our prayers in the morning and in the evening are directed to the sun and through him to God.

The open yard celebration is symbolic of this concept. The sun travelling over the head in all his glory is directly sought to be propitiated and the puja takes place usually between the hours of 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Some would connect the pongal day with a *Bhagavata purana* episode and say that it represents the gratitude of the pastoral clan for Krishna's lifting up the Govardhana hill in order to protect the cowherds and the cattle from the wrath of Indra, who showered a stone storm on them. This seems a liltle far-fetched and not appropriate.

The next day's celebration is called *mattup-pongal* or *go-puja* and the fourth day is the annual *kari-nal ;* this is an inauspicious day and no serious activity is attempted on this day. Instead, the whole day is set apart for games and play.

So this is the Pongal festival. It is an occasion for joy all round and for sharing of food with the workers. The farmer is the real producer of wealth ; he does not calculate his produce

in terms of rupees and paise but, for the moment at least, in terms of the joy and comfort he can distribute to his immediate kin and friends, to his workmen and to the less fortunate. Valluvar sang of the joy of giving and we find this joy radiating from every rural home in Tamilnad, conferring joy both on the recciver and on the giver. Besides it brings about an atmosphere of peace in the rural community and a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction among all the people.

Special Features

During the *Pongal* season, the village potter has a roaring business. He prepares for this period months ahead. All families cook their pongal offering on this day and the next, on new pots, usually three, bought for the occasion. Every family, be it rich or modernised and urban, or poor, rural or the labour class, must purchase pots for the occasion. Hence there is a great demand on the potter. His entire family works for the occasion. He has been waiting for the festival and satisfactorily rises up to the occasion. In the villages, he himself takes the pots to the houses of the well to do people on the morning of the bhogi day and gets payment. By long association with the families through successive generations, he knows the tastes of individual families and caters, although there is not much room for choice in the matter of earthern pots. In the evening of course he goes to the houses along with the other artisans of the village and receives his share of the presents of paddy, cane, jaggery and fruits.

The carpenter also has an important fuction on this day. It is his duty to supply a spatula and ladle to every family in the village. The spatula is just a two feet long thin wooden piece, two inches wide at the tip and an inch and a half wide at the handle, used for stirring up the pongal cooking on the oven. The ladle is a very simple contrivance with a coconut shell cup at the tip inserted at the end of a small bamboo split stick, used for serving liquid food and stiring up milk that is being heated on the oven. He makes scores of these and snpplies each family one or more sets on the morning of the Bhogi. There is no payment for these but presents are given the previous evening.

The stove or oven for pongal is made by each family on the previous day. It is about nine inches high made by sticking together three or four new full bricks with mud and plastered on the outside also with mud. They are also smeared with cowdung paste and dried in the sun. About seven such blocks are made to provide for three pots to be cooked at the same time for milk, rice and vegetables, separately.

The sugar cane is an important item on the celebrations of pongal. In the past it was an important agricultural produce, when India was exporting its sugar for the world market, till the commercial exploitation by the west took the cane crop to the other countries and foreign production came to supplant Indian export.

In many areas like the city of Madras and the region round it, pongal is the occasion for new clothes and not *dipavali*.

Some would imagine that the Pongal celebration for three pays is in honour of Indra, Agni and Ganga. This has no basis in actual practice or in theory. The first day is no doubt a relic of the Indra *vila* of a hoary past. This was indeed a day of thanksgiving to Indra, as Meghanatha, for his bounty of rain for the cultivation season. The second day is the day of thanks-giving to Surya the Sungod for the heat and the light that he gives through out the year, which make life on earth possible. The third day is a day expressing man's gratitude to the cow and other cattle, the real helpers of man. The fourth day is a day of relaxation for all the people. Agni nowhere comes into the picture in these festivals. Ganesa also has nothing to do with any of these; he has his days of worship on other separate days.

Literature

Silappadhikaram begins with invocation verses in praise of the Moon, the Sun, the Rain and the city of Puhar. The following is the second verse in praise of the Sun :

Praise be to the Sun, praise be to the Sun.
The Sun goes round the Meru hill,
Like the Sceptre of the King of the Kaveri,

Worship of the sun is probably as old as Man. The daily *sandhya vandana* and the first puja in all Sivapuja are indeed to the sun.

Pongal is a period of thanksgiving when entire communities relax after a whole year of struggle with the wind and the rain and the sun, and express their gratitude to the Almighty, through the Sun, His manifest form, who had given them sustenance. It is also a day of sharing with others who have worked with them, both men and animals. People greet one another with the words *pal pongitra* or *pongal aacha*-'has the milk boiled over, meaning thereby that 'the harvest for the year may be good and may you be prosperous, '*Pongalo pongal*' is the cry made by the women and children when the milk in the pot boils and flows over. All of them cry in unison '*Pongalo pongal*'. At the hour of pongal, the whole villages will be resounding with this cry raised from every house and hamlet :

May your pot of milk boil over,
May your cup of joy overflow,
Pongalo pongal !

May the Sun illumine you and yours,
May the joy of this day and this hour
Last on every day all the year round,
Pongalo pongal !

GO-PUJA OR MATTUP-PONGAL

The *Sankaranti* festival in Tamilnad is a festival of four days. The first day is the Bhogi, the festival for Indra, reminiscent of the observances recorded in *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimekhalai*. The second day is the Sankaranti proper, the *Pongal* day, a day of thanksgiving to Surya, the Sungod. The third day is dedicated to the cow, the *Mattup-pongal* and the fourth is set part for games and sports for the adults and the older people. We shall here examine the *Mattup-pongal* separately.

The Cow in History

The cow has been the most valuable and cherished companion of pre-historic man in his nomadic life. True, the horse and the camel also had been such companions in certain areas, but there was nothing to equal the services of the cow. In return for man's services, the cow gave him milk for food and nourishment, surplus milk left over after feeding its own calf. Historians would say that the cow was the constant companion of the Aryans when they entered India and for the first time settled on the Gangetic plains. The cow provided them food in the first stage and was in a sense responsible for man's very survival on earth. Then the male of the species, the bull, came to be used for transport. Probably ancient man rode the bull and later, harnessed it to wheels, to carry him and his goods. In the Saiva religion, the bull is the mount of Siva the Supreme Being.

The earliest literature of man, the Rg Veda contains many prayers to Ushas, Agni, Maruts, Indra etc. to give him cows and protect his cows. The following Rg Vedic mantras may be remembered here (Book X, hymns 169, 172):

May the wind blow upon the cows
with healing: may they eat
Herbage full of sustaining juices.
May they drink waters, rich in life
and fatness; to the cow that moves
on feet, be gracious, oh Rudra!
Oh Indra! cows in our cattlepen
grant us, with their full streams
of milk and off-spring in plenty.
With all thy beauty, come, Oh Surya!
Let the cows, approaching with full udders,
follow on thy path.

These Rig Vedic hymns will show the concern of our ancients over the welfare of the cows. The cow had been glorified as the giver of all things to human beings; the Kamadhenu symbolizes this aspect of the Indian culture and the reverence to the cow. The *Raghu vamsa* devotes a whole chapter to the service

rendered by the king Dilipa, an ancestor of Rama to the celestia cow in order that he might get the gift of a child. The story of Manu-Niti-Chola is even more well known. When his own son, and only heir to the throne, inadvertently rode his chariot over a calf causing its death, Manu would not be satisfied with any ritual of expiation: he actually rode his chariot over his own son, so that he also could share the grief of the cow.

Indian culture takes pride in portraying Krishna, the great hero of the Bhagavata and also of the Mahabharata, the teacher of the Gita, not as a king but as the Gopala, the Tender of Cows, where all the human souls are the cows and he is the cow-herd.

The cow is the most auspicious object for any good act and we have even today the ritual of taking a cow with its calf into a newly built house, the actual *graha-pravesam* being made by the owners themselves, after the cow.

If we know all these concepts in Indian thought and culture, we can understand why cow slaughter is so abhorrent to the Indian mind; it is classed together with infanticide, woman slaughter and brahmin slaughter, the most heinous of all crimes.

The Puja

This background will help us to understand the spirit behind *go-puja* and the *mattup-pongal* festival. The *pongal* festival of Tamilnad coincides with the *Uttarayana* and it is a festival of thanksgiving to the Elements, represented by the sun and the rain, Surya and Indra. The third day of the festival is the *Mattup-pongal* which is as elaborate and as important as *Pongal* itself and is in spirit a day of thanksgiving to the Cow.

On this day also the entire house is decorated as usual, a *puja* to the sun is performed in the open court yard of the house, invoking him on a pinch of turmeric or sandal, with lamps lit with ghee on either side, plantain fruits. sugar cane and rice offerings.

In the Tamil language, *maadu* means the cattle, the cow and the bull, and as the cows were the real measure of the material richness of any person in pre-historic society, the term *maadu* was also applied to *all wealth*, and means the same even today in literary use. Man in the Indian civilization has always been a grateful being and this day, the second day of Thai, the day after *Pongal*, is dedicated to an expression of this gratitude to his greatest helper, the Cow.

The same puja to the Sun god is performed this day also in the open courtyard, as was done on the *Sankaranti* day, in the same form. The cows, calves and bulls are neatly bathed in the morning in the village tank. Their horns are trimmed, polished, painted and decorated with brass ferrules and garlands of flowers. Wreaths made up of *nelli* fruits and leaves, margosa leaves and coloured pith are placed round their neck. After the puja to the sun god in the court yard. the puja materials with lamps are taken to the cattle pen and a complete *puja* to the cows is then performed. A good and favourite cow is chosen and it receives all the *puja* on behalf of the others.

Sandal, turmeric, and *kumkum* are applied to the horns, forehead and the lateral parts of the cow's body, flowers and leaf petals are offered, and camphor is waved before its face, along with incense shown all round. Then the cow is fed with the food - rice and other dishes - and plantain fruits, previously offered to Surya in the court yard. Then a stamp of the milk of the common milk-hedge plant, considered a cactus variety, called in Tamil *tirugu kalli*, whose sap is deemed to protect the animals from all air-borne infections, is made on the hind parts of the cows and bulls, with the ridge of a brass tumbler soaked in that milk. (Broken small branches of the *kalli* used to be hung in the cattle pen with the same purpose.) Lastly, the worshipper prostrates before the cows not only to express his gratitude but also to demonstrate his faith in the doctrine that God dwells in all His creation. The entire family prostrates before the cows and then goes into the house for lunch.

The Sports

There is another significant ritual in the evening. All the cows, bulls and calves of the village are gathered together in a common large open space and driven round by the owners themselves, with loud noises and the sounding of the village drums. This is called *madu-mirattal* in the Tanjavur and adjoining districts. It is known also as *manji-virattu* (*mirattal*) in Ramanathapuram and some other districts, where young men set out to tame an infuriated bull. This is a relic, of an ancient concept in popular as well as literary convention, of a hero taming a ferocious bull in order to win the hand of a bride. This is now done symbolically in every pastoral village.

This *Jallikkattu* may be called the Indian style bull fighting. The bulls are decorated with floral garlands round the neck and the horns etc. and are subdued by daring young men by holding them down by the horns by sheer strength of arms. Aged men also take part in this dangerous exploit, both out of their long practice and out of a desire to train the younger generation.

This act of taming a bull is known as *eru-taluvudal* in Tamil romantic poetry, and the marriage brought about thereby is known as the *asura-manam*, among both the Sanskrit and the Tamil literary traditions. The *Bhagavata purana* says that Krishna tamed seven such bulls which were demons in bull form, and wedded the damsel Nagnajit of the Ayar clan. The Tamil Bhagavata lore has evolved a fine idyll round Nappinnai and it gives a wonderful story of how Nappinnai loved Krishna and how he tamed a bul and married her. Nappinnai is mentioned by Andal and by Devaram also. The Nappinnai story is a fine heritage of the Tamilnad, going back even the *Silappadhikaram*.

After this ritual, the cattle run home. At the entrance to the cattle pen, a long pestle is laid on the ground and the cows are made to jump over it. A lighted camphor floating on vermilion water (where lime and turmeric have been dissolved to produce the vermition colour is shown before them, as is shown before the deities and new married couples, as a sign of welcome and as a measure of warding off the evil eye.

Visit to Elders

Then all the people attend a temple service. A special *prasadam*, known as *veppilaik-katti* (consisting of lemon leaves pounded with salt and a few green chilles) is distributed to the worshippers. This is calculated to cure all minor indisposition caused by over-eating on the pongal day and this day. From the temple, every one goes home and prostrates before his parents and elders and then vists the houses of other elders to prostrate before them and receive their blessings. Women also are required to visit the relatives and receive their blessings.

Even the harshest mother-in-law has to set aside much of her anger at the daughter-in-law and bless her, when she prostrates before her. In the recent past, close relatives who had fallen apart due to petty family feuds and litigation were required to visit one another, and in the process of this prostration and blessing all petty animosities were forgotten. The occasion thus servcd as a restorer of good relationship with relatives, neighbours and friends.

An important feature of the cooking 'on this gopuja day is the preparation of a vegetable side dish for the rice meal, consisting of seven different vegetables or twenty one vegetables and roots and tubers. This may be construed as symbolic of requiring plenty of vegetables to be used, a rich variety of the vegetables at that, not only on this day but on every day, the year round. The rice pongal and the particular vegetable dish are taken by hand and fed into the month of the Cow. (Worship of the cow is a feature also in the *Savitri nonbu.* Thus concludes the third day of the pongal group of festival days. The fourth is a day of sports and games for all people who take a on complete holiday mood.

Vrshabha deva was a *tirttankara*;in Jainism, and so is an object of worship for the Jains (*Vrshabha*-bull). The Vira Saivas whose great leader was Lord Basava (1125-1165) also attach great veneration to the bull.

Some Traditions

In these days of chemical fertilizers it is being increasingly recognized that without an adequate supply of organic manure

chemical fertilizers cannot produce good results. Their indiscriminate use has been reported to have laid waste vast areas of rich arable lands in the United States. In this context the cow dung as a source of powerful organic manure is invaluable. There is a fine legend associated with this value of the cow dung. Several aeons ago, Lakshmi in Vaikuntha wen tout for a walk. She came upon a herd of cows chewing the cud lying down on a green meadow. The belief is that all the gods of the Hindu pantheon dwell on the various organs of the cow. Lakshmi with her divine vision saw the cows and perceived this dwelling of the gods on the various parts of the cow's body. Finding herself absent in that galaxy of Gods, Lakshmi called rhe leader of the cows and asked that she be given a place on their body. The cow, quite a shrewd one, knew that Lakshmi (prosperity) is always fleeting and so said "Madam, I shall consult the others and tell you". Accordingly a parliament was held, and the request of Lakshmi was placed before all the cows. The concensus of opinion was that as Lakshmi was fickle and could not be relied upon to stay in one place for long, she might be asked to stay in a place of their choice. When the leader reported this to her, she agreed. Thereupon the leader told her, "Madam, we have resolved to ask you to stay on our urine and dung". Accordingly from that day Lakshmi is dwelling on cow dung and cow's urine. What a wonderful legend, to bring home the truth that only the cow dung and urine are the greatest sources of natural manure in order to bring about a rich harvest from the crops! This truth is as valid today as on the day when Lakshmi agreed to take her abode on the dung.

Secondly, the value of cow's urine as an internal purifier. The *pancha gavya* is the mixture used for Siva's bath (pancha-five, gavya-products from the cow). It consists of cows milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung. During ceremonies at homeon the annual *sraddha* and other occasions, the priestoffersthese forSiva's bath and gives them to the people of the house for sipping as a purifie of internal;impurities. It is a well-known medical truth that the cow's urine very quickly heals the severest scabies and allied skin ailments. Therefore the curative properties of the *acnhagvaya* cannot be gainsaid.

KARINAL OR KANNIP - PONGAL

The fourth day of the group of Pongal festivals is the *Karinal*. The *karinal* occurs according to the calendar every month and it is considered an inauspicious day; no good activity is done on that day. This fourth day is the day of the annual *karinal*. The entire village puts on a holiday mood and sets this day apart for rural games and sports.

The Village Games

The male members separate themselves into different groups and play the game of *chadu-gudu*, otherwise called the *baleen chadugudu* game (the modern *kabaddi* of the schools). This is not a gentle lady's affair but quite a vigorous man's game at end of which many return home with broken arms or sprained ankles. Probably in the past this type of holiday and games was the training ground for the manly fighters who went out to meet the enemy forces. Every *karinal* was the day of Eton in the village, training heroes for Waterloo.

In the past, every village had a large open space on its outskirts where the cattle were brought to rest for some time in the evening before turning them into the village to go to their respective cattlesheds. The place was bordered by large shady trees. It had throughout soft soil, suited for playing. Into this place went all the male members of the village. They separated themselves into groups, generally depending on the age. Young boys and very old people were there as spectators. The several teams played the *chadugudu* game in separate groups. Usually they had their breakfast by 8-30 a. m. and the games lasted for about four hours. The whole village had been as it were looking forward to this day dedicated to sports. In this manly game caste did not count; in a sportsmanlike manner all castes mingled. The well-to-do people of the day were also sturdy of physique and were good sportsmen. Effeminacy among them had set in only through urban living, which was indeed rare. After the game, all the people had a bath in the village tank and went home to a sumptuous repast. The performance of the players was sufficient

material for them to talk and reminisce about for the whole year, till the next *karinal*.

The Urban Sight-seeing

The city of Madras calls the day the *Kanum-Pongal* (or the *pongal* cf sight-seeing) and *Kannip-pongal* (the *pongal* of the young girls). In the Madras of the pre-war days, this was a great holiday for all the citizens. There were the electric trams, connecting many places at cheap fares; roads were free; cars or buses were few; lorries did not exist. Jay walking on the roads was quite safe; the roads were then thought to be intended for people's walking; fast moving vehicles were negligible. Most of the roads like the China Bazaar, Mount Road etc. had shady trees. House breaking was unknown. So poor people locked up their houses and all of them, men, women and children, carrying some eatables in cloth bags, trekked all the distance to the museum (the *Setta* or dead college), the zoo (*Uyir* or living college) the aquarium in the Marina beach (*Meen* college) etc. visiting the People's park, the Moore Market and the Marina Beach, generally ending up in the Mylapore or Triplicane temple or Kandasami Koil, whichever was nearer to home. It was a glorious sight in those days of fifty years ago to witness waves upon waves of humanity in colourful *saris* and *pavadais* and frocks, with well plaited pigtails beautifully knotted at the end wlth a bright ribbon, going the round of the city on foot. No hippidom, no black glasses, no trousers even for men, no minis kirts, or semi-open breasts. The city for them then consisted of Mylapore, the Beach, Triplicane, Museum, People's park, Moore Market and Kandasami Koil. Young girls also freely roamed about with their families without any fear or inhibition and hence the name *Kannip-pongal*, also called by the name *Kannu*.

This ends the four day *pongal* festival, a truly social festival, which people had been for a long time longing for and which ends on such a gay note. This city ramble was of course unknown in the villages then.

We have yet the modern *kanum pongal* in the cities, but there is no educative sight-seeing; people come out of their

homes; not entire families, because they no longer can lock a house and go out. They can no longer walk on the road because this will end them np in a mortuary. So they end up in a cinema house which is virtually open the whole day, empty their purses and return home, not gay, but depressed.

THAIP—PUSAM

The ascendancy of certain asterisms in some months is celebrated as an important festival of that month. Every month has its own star which has such importance. In the month of *Thai* (January-February) the asterism *Pusam* (*Pushya* in Sanskrt) has such importance. The day generally coincides with the full moon day of the month or comes as close to it as possible. Pushya is the asterism *Cancri.* Worship offered on this particular day of this month is specially meritorious.

Brhaspati, the spiritual preceptor of Indra, the king of the celestials, is considered to preside over the star. He symbolizes wisdom and the word Brhaspati is the proverbial term for great wisdom. Bathing in the holy waters on this day has been considered to please Brhaspati and to be helpful in the growth of wisdom. Where a river is available, people go to the river for a bath on this day.

Thaip-pusam is most important in the Tiruvidaimarudur shrine in Tanjavur district. The form of Siva enshrined here is simply called Mahalingam the Supreme lingam of all lingams. There is a festive temple celebration on this day. Many legends are associated with this day and this shrine. Devotees bathe in the water of the holy well in the temple and worship Mahalingaswami. The temple tree is *marudu* (hence the name Tiru-Idai Marudur). Marudu in Sanskrit is the *arjuna* tree; three places have this tree dedicated to them; the Mallikarjuna in the north (Andhra Pradesh), Tiruppudaimarudur or Putarjuna in Tirunelveli district and this place, middle Madhyarjuna.

The day is also impartant in many famous Subrahmanya shrines such as Palani and Vaidisvarankoil. Many temple inscriptions as in Tiruvedikudi and Tiruvaiyaru record the grant of land and other endowments for the celebration of the festival.

Tiru Jnanasambandhar in his famous *Pumpavaip-padikam*, sung at Mayilappur to bring back to life the young damsel, Pumpavai from her ashes and bones at the request of her father, refers to this festival and asks her: "Shall you disappear, O Pumpavai, without witnessing this *Thaip-pusam* festival celebrated by ladies, wearing choice trinkets, with fine dishes prepared in ghee, in the temple of the Lord of Kapalisvarar who wears the sacred ash on the body in his great city of Mayilappur, where dwell demure damsels decking there brows in collyrium?"

Thaip-pusam festival is celebrated with great pomp and rejoicing by Tamilians overseas wherever they happen to be. It is in honour of Subrahmanya as Karttikeya. Particularly in Singapore, all the people, speaking different languages and coming of different races, and even different religions, celebrate it, The Nagarattar community had built temples of Subrahmanya, wherever they had settled down in groups, and usually the temple is known as the *Chettiyar* temple. Carrying the *Kavadi*, piercing the tongue and some other parts of the body with a small spear (called *vel*) and drawing a small decorated charit, with His image in it along the streets, atttaching it to the waist are common features of the celebration. They are features of a *vrata* or vow undertaken by the devotees who live on one light meal a day for the previous day and this. They have a regular full meal only after the Pusam festival in the Temple is over and they recieve the *prasadam* there. The whole area reverberates to the sound of *Vel vel vel* Muruha, chanted by all the people. The person who has taken up the *vrata* carries the *kavadi* etc., his whole family and a number of friends following him along the streets to the temple.

Thaip-pusam is the day on which Ramalingaswami of Vadalur is considered to have disappeared from the earth by locking himself up in a room in a small house there. The day is now celebrated as a great day for the worship of God as *Jothi* the Great Illumination. It is a great event for the locality and for the devotees of Ramalinga.

The importance of the Thaip-pusam festival at Tiruvidaimarudur is also seen from the numerous references in the *Deva-*

ram. St. Jnanasambandhar says that young ladies celebrated it with rice cooked in ghee; that sages and celestials came here and bathed in the river; the whole nation bathes in the river and purifies itself. St. Appar also mentions the *pusam* festival.

Thaip-pusam is a day of great celebration to Indians, particularly the Tamil people living overseas in areas like Malaysia and Singapore. This is an occasion for worship at all shrines irrespective of the sect. Even non-Hindus take part in the festivities which take on the colour more of a social celebration than a religious one. People carry the usual *kavadi*, reserved for Muruhan temples in South India, also to the temples of Siva, Krishna, Sakti and Mariyamman. The day is a public holiday in Singapore.

RATHA SAPTAMI

Occurrence

This is one of the less familar observances of the *Magha masa* (*Thai* in Tamil calculation, corresponding to January-February). The day is the seventh day in the bright fortnight (after the new moon day). This day is specially important to Surya the sun god and is known also as *Jaya saptami*, since it is considered to confer success (*iaya*-success) on any good enterprise to the observer of the *vrata*. It is observed mostly by smarta and madhva brahmin families.

Significance

Surya is supposed to ride the skies mounted on his golden chariot with a single wheel, drawn by seven green horses. The single wheel is symbolic of the supreme uniqueness of the sun who has no second so far as the earth is concerned. The horses are green because he, by his light and heat, causes the rains to fall and make the earth green with food crops for man and for all of God's creation. Green is the colour of nature's bounty. The chariot and horses are considered to be a present to Surya from Vishnu the Preserver of all things created. His charioteer is Aruna, the legless son of Kasyapa in Hindu mythology. The

light of dawn is known as *Arunodaya*, as Aruna precedes Surya in his appearance as light in the east (the light of pre-dawn).

Ratha Saptami is also held to be the day on which the Sun' chariot turns round towards the north, although *uttarayana*, the Sun's northward course is supposed to commence on the first of the Tamil month, *Thai* (13 or 14th January).

Observance

Surya on this day is invoked on a *kalasa* (pot) and his form mounted on his chariot is symbolically painted on the *kalasa* in red sandal. *Aditya hrdaya* is the great favourite *sloka*, prayer hymn of Surya. Rama is said to have recited it before his actual battle with Ravana.

Erukku is considered to be a poisonous plant. Its poison is contained in the milky juicc of its leaves and stem. Yet there is the convention which requires pcople to have their morning bath on this day placing a few *erukku* (*calotropsis* gigantia) leaves on their heads. The flowers of this poisonous plant are supposed to be favourites to Siva and they are particularly sought after for Ganesa puja on the *Ganesa chaturthi* day. People apply the sesame powder and oil to their heads and bathe in the river.

The Sanskrit word *Arkka* means both the Sungod and the *erukku* flower. Hence *erukku* might have been considered in the past to be the favourite of the Sun. Besides, according to the astrological sciences, the sungod is the controller of riches and so the *erukku* might have been introduced as a measure of pleasing him.

A *pongal* of rice in sugar is the usual food offering (*sarkkarai pongal*) to the Sun god on this day.

Legends

The day is called *Ratha saptami* because this day happened to be the day of the commencement of the Vaivasvata *manvantara* (day of re-creation of the universe) and the Sun ascended

his chariot on this *saptami* day. The legend says that God created the sun to shed lustre on the planets and the solar system. After a time the sun's light and heat had got diminished in intensity. Then by divine will, he was turned on a lathe by the celestials on this day and he regained all his lustre and glory. (The turning is like diamond-cutting) Hence the day assumes importance in the worship of the sun god.

There is only one temple in the whole of Tamilnad dedicated to the Sun God and that is the Suryanarkoil shrlne, situated about 10 miles east of Kumbakonam in Tanjavur district. In this place, Surya occupies the central sanctum, along with his two *puranic* consorts *Usha* and *Pratyusha*, while the other *graha-devatas* or planets are distributed in small sub-temples around the sanctum in their respective sanctums all turning towards the centre.

If the asterism Rohini (Tauri) happens to coincide with this *saptami* (seventh day), it is held to be specially beneficial. *Saptami tithi* should be present at the time of Arunodaya ; this period of time is considered as auspicious as *sankranti* itself.

Special Features

In a place called Tiru Miyachur near Peralam in Tanjavur district, the temple festival is conducted around the *Ratha Saptami* day. Surya the sun god worshipped Siva in this placc for removal of a curse on him and so the annual festival here on this day which is special to him. It is well known that the Sakti of the shrine in Tirumiyachur is known as Lalitambikai, whcse *sahasranama* by Sankara and its bhashya by Bhaskara-acharya are very famous.

11. MASI

MASI - MAGHAM

Occurrence

Masi magham is the most important social festival occurring in the Tamil month of Masi (the Magha masa, February-March). Magham is the day when the star of that name *(Leonis)* holds sway. It generally occurs with the full moon day in the month. Brhaspati (the preceptor of the celestials, as the planet Jupiter) is supposed to preside over this star.

Significance

To the sea coast near Chidambaram we find even today, the image of Sri Varahamurti from far distant Sri Mushnam being taken in procession for the bath or *tirttavari*, as it is called. It is not mere bath : it will take a week for the procession to reach the sea front. So usually the *Masi magha* festival is said to last also for a week. All along the beaten route, temporary resting places are put up where the deity and its retinue halt. There is full ceremonial puja in all these places, for the darsan of the people around :

The aim of this festival can thus be seen to be to take the image into distant places to give a *darsan* even to those who have been denied by custom entry into the temple proper. So this is a sort of concession to such people, or shall we say expiation, permitting them to see and worship the Lord. This gives an added social significance to the festival. Where there is no sea nearby, the river takes the place of the sea. Deities are taken to the river bank, a *tirttavari* is conducted and the deity is stationed on the river bank for the day and taken back to the temple only late in the evening or at night. Here also there is the social purpose of allowing all classes of people to go and worship.

Not only the sea front, but the entire length of the main river in the Kaveri delta will present a gala appearance on this day in celebration of *Masi magham.*

Apart from merits accruing to the soul from a bath on the *magham* day, popular folklore and folk-song would say that childless people will beget children by a bath on this day.

Observance

The important function connected with *Masi-magham* is the sea bath. In all places situated near the sea coast, sea bath is very important. All the people in the locality and for many miles around go to the sea for a dip. In order to give the bath a religious significance, the deity of the local temple, and the other deities (principally Siva and Vishnu) from all the temples in the neighbourhood, are taken in procession in a festive manner to the sea shore. A decorated temporary resting place is erected close to the waterline where the deity is stationed and the image is ceremonially immersed in the sea with due rituals at an auspicious moment. Simultaneously all the assembled people bathe in the sea. This is what is called an annual *(Kumbha) mela* in North India. (*Kumbha* is the *kumbha rasi*, the *Masi* month.) Rivers replace the sea.

Maha Magham

Special prominence attaches on this day to the city of of Kumbakonam (called *Kudantai* in ancient literature) on the banks of the Kaveri. Like Kanchipuram, this place also is a city of temples. There are many Siva and Vishuu temples of importance here. Of particular importance is the *Mahamagha* (*mamangha* in popular lore) festival, occuring once in 12 years. The planet Jupiter enters the *Simha rasi* (the Zodiacal sign Leo) on this day once in twelve years and great importance is attached to this particular day. This corresponds to the *Kumbha mela* of Prayag which also occurs once in twelve years. There is a large tank in this city to the south of the Sri Naga-nathaswami temple with all the four sides built with walls and steps and a series of 16 small temples all round the steps. Siva and Vishnu, taken out in procession from all the important

temples in the city go over here in the morning for a ceremonial bath in the tank.

The tradition is that the nine rivers celebrated in Hindu lore Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Kaveri, Sindhu, Narmada, Kumari (Tamraparni) and Sarayu or Krishna—appear in a confluence in the waters of this tank on this day and therefore a bath in it is the most meritorious in a life time. As this occurs only once in twelve years, people from all over the Tamilnad and even from the neighbouring states flock to this place. The last *Mahamagham* festival in 1968 drew a vast crowd of a million and a half people here.

The *maha magham* festival is a proverbial occurrence. It is held so sacred that marriages are not performed during the year. The tank was repaired and fortified with walls by the Nayak kings of Tanjavur, under the guidance of Govinda Dikshitar who was the Minister of Sevappa Nayak and his successors in the 17th century. Krishnadevaraya, the famous king of Vijayanagar had witnessed one of the *mahamagha* festivals in honour of which he had made many endowments in several places such as Nagalapuram, Vedaranyam, Kuttalam etc. St. Appar (650 A.D) in his song sung in this place sings that the celebrated rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sami, Sarasvati, and Gomati are present here on this day.

Three of the Siva shrines - Kumbesvarar (as Kuda mukku), Kudantaik-kilkkottam and Kudandaik-Karonam as well as the Sarangapani temple of Vishnu (known as Ara-amutan temple) are celebrated in the Saiva and Vaishnava hymns. Besides, the temple of Ramaswami is famous for its remarkable sculptures of the Nayak period.

Legends

Many legends are connected with this place. Brahma, in the ages before creation, had kept the seed of the universe in an *amrta* pot; its overflow is the *Maha magham* tank. Hence all the sacred rivers abide here and they absolve the bathers

from all sins. The Lord Siva of the place is known as Kumbhesvara (from *kumbha* the pot). He aimed an arrow at the pot in the form of a hunter and the *amrta* flowed out through the hole so made and so the place came to be known as *kuda-mukku* (the pot's spout).

Siva is said to have heard the exposition of the Pranava mantra from Subrahmanya on this day and this is celebrated in the shrine Swamimalai close by. Another legend would say that Sakti, the Supreme Mother was born once as a right winded conch (*valampuri-chanku*) on a lotus flower on the River Jamuna, near Prayag. King Daksha Prajapati found the *chanku* which transformed itself into a girl baby. He named it Dakshayani (daughter of Daksha) whose hand was later given to Lord Siva in wedding. The appearance of Sakti in this manner was on the Masi magham day.

Two other days of equal importance for the ceremonial sea bath may be mentioned here. One is the *Ardhodaya*, the sacred conjunction of the sun and the moon (*amavasya*) at sunrise on a Sunday with *sravana nakshatra* and *vyatipadayoga* in the Tamil month of *Thai*. The other is the *Mahodaya*, the same sacred conjunction happening on a Monday morning (in stead of Sunday). These two days are important in all water fronts no doubt, but the greatest importance attaches to the place Kodikkarai (Point Calimere) in Tanjavur district where the Bay of Bengal meets the Indian Ocean.

Literature

The festival and the bath had been very ancient. Poets celebrate it elaborately in their poems. We find St. Tiru Jnanasambandha mentioning it in his song sung to bring back Pumpavai to life from her ashes. He sings : "Shalt thou not witness, O Pumpavai, the worship of Kapali at Mylapore by his devotee after he has gone through the sea bath ?"

A large purana in 1400 verses was sung in the middle of the 16th century celebrating the virtues of a bath on this magha day. It is attributed to the eminent poet prince Athivira rama

Pandiya. A family of Sivacharyas has been in the habit of expounding the whole *purana* on this day to a pious audience. The great popularity of the *purana* had probably caused another writer in the next century to render it in the *ammanai* (ballad) form. This is also a large book.

MAHA SIVARATRI

Occurrence

Siva the Unmanifest is considered to have manifested Him self in the form of an Effulgent Light, in a Sivalinga in times of yore on this particular day, the 14th day of the dark fortnight of Magha masa, at dead of night. Siva is believed to be present and to manifest himself in all the Siva Lingas on this night. Hence the particular day and the night thereof are of greatimportance to the Saivas. This night is also considered as the period when the first creation was made at the beginning of the present cylec of *yugas*.

The day is observed as one of fasting, Members of the non-vegetarian sections of society forego meat for the day. All people bathe once again in the evening and attend the congregational worship in the local temple at the end of *each quarter* of the night. Bathing in a sacred river is considered to be of a greater virtue.

Significance

Fasting has been held to confer immense benefits on man from time immemorial. All religions have been enjoining their devotees to fast on some days in the year and turn their thoughts godward. Mahatma Gandhi had been fasting for one day in the week and also observing silence. He has written many pages on the efficacy of fasting in cleansing the human system of all poison and unhealthy matter, and in keeping it in a fresh and healthy state thereafter. Even today many persons fast for a day in the week, a day in the fortnight, or a day in the month. Instead of enjoining people to fast for a day for reasons of health, our religion has been laying down fasting as a religious

duty, because the religious minded people will follow the religious injunctions more willingly and scrupulously. Hence all fasting days in the Hindu society had become religion oriented.

The Vaikuntha Ekadasi of the Vaishnavas and the Maha Sivaratri of the Saivas are two such days of annual fasting. The Maha Sivaratri occurs in the month of Masi in Tamil (called *Magha masa* in the Sanskrit and the Saka reckoning, corresponding to February-March).

The worship of Siva as the Supreme Being, the Absolute of metaphysics, knows no beginning and the tenets of the Saiva religion were not laid down by any prophet. It may appear strange that the religion had evolved itself along with the culture and the civilization of the people.

The Hindu gods are generally supposed to form a trinity: Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Rudra the Destroyer. But it should be remembered these are merely three aspects of the One Supreme, who is the Narayana of Vaishnava, and Siva of the Saiva; Rudra is not Siva; he is just one aspect of Siva.

Observance

Puja during the night is important and even small temples perform the puja in an elaborate manner. The temple orchestra or *nagasvaram*, which, though absent on other days, sounds during the four quarters of the night. The *archaka* bathes four times in the night and offers four different kinds of rice food offerings during the four occasions. Puja during each of the four quarters is important. The flowers for *archana* and food offering vary with each quarter. The flower is the lotus for the first quarter and the food offering is the pulse-ghee-rice (*paruppu-pongal*). It is *tulasi* leaves for flower and rice *payasam* for the second quarter. Be it remembered that *tulasi* (the common basil) though a favourite with Vishnu is also eligible for *Sivarchana*. For the third quarter it is *vilva* and *ellannam* (sesame-powder rice). For the last quarter it is *nilotpala* or *sengalunir* (the blue *nelumbium* flower or the red one) and plain rice (*ven-pongal*)

Where different flowers cannot be had, *vilva* leaves may be substituted. Similarly for *naivedya*. Where the different varieties cannot be prepared, a simple offering of plain rice and ghee will do. According to the desire of the worshipper, *vadai*, *sundal* etc, may be added.

Elaborate *abhisheka* on the four occasions is important. All the materials for anointment are used now - oil, *panchamirta*. ghee, milk, curds, honey, sugarcane juice, coconut water, fruits and sandal paste are used. The last puja is done at day break. The worshippers receive only the sacred ash as the *prasadam* of Siva. After worship, they go home and have a full meal. They are expected to keep awake for the night and stay in the temple uttering Sivanama.

Those who have had initiation in the *atmartha* puja, i.e., personal worship of God in their home, likewise bathe four times in the night and perform the *pujas* also with *vilva* leaves and in addition attend the temple worship. They are expected to utilize as many of the *abhisheka* materials as they can gather. The belief is that those who perform *puja* in this manner or witness the temple puja and participate in the worship will attain *moksha*, i. e., they will have no more births and deaths.

Banaras, the seat of all Hinduism and also of Saivism, has been the important shrine for the Siva ratri festival. Although all shrines are efficacious, Tirukkalatti, Tiruvaikavur and Srisailam in South India hold equal importance. Many epigraphical records of the Chola dynasty record endowments to several temples for various items connected with the Siva ratri worship.

Legends

A tired hunter, who was unable to get any bird or beast on a day which happened to be Sivaratri, sat upon a *vilva* tree to pass the night, avoiding the predatory tigers of the jungle. To keep himself awake so that he might not fall down, he plucked the *vilva* leaves and dropped them down one by one. Accidentally there was a Sivalinga under the tree. The hunter had no food that day because he was not able to hunt an animal and he

had also no wink of sleep on the tree. Siva, indwelling in the *linga*, accepted the leaves along with particles of water thereon caused by the rains of the evening, as *abhisheka* and floral offerings, and when on the hunter's death his soul was claimed by the myrmidons of Yama the God of Death, Siva caused His own *ganas* to bring his soul to the Sivaloka on account of the merit accruing to him from his worship on the Sivaratri day.

Another legend also relates to a similar hunter perched on a *vilva* tree on a Sivaratri night. He had spread a net underneath for ensnaring unwary deer. He was also dropping leaves unknowingly on a Sivalinga beneath. A deer was caught in the net but when it said in a human voice that it was a celestial in the shape of a deer on account of a curse and that it would return after saluting its husband, he released it out of pity. The stag came next with another mate. When he attempted to kill them they pleaded that they would now go and place their young ones in the care of another and then return. He again took pity and released them. All of them went away and came back to him at day break as promised and offered themselves to be killed for his food. The hunter was much moved by their truthfulness and had now no heart to kill them but released all of them. For this act of unheard of mercy on the part of a traditionally cruel hunter and for his *archana* on the Sivaratri day, he was raised to the Sivaloka.

The legends may not be taken to be fact. But they serve to indicate God's concern for man's moral evolution and his surrender to God.

The Sivaratri day is also held sacred by the Jains who call it the day on which Sri Rishabha deva attained *nirvana*.

Traditional lore mentions five types of Sivaratri. The annual Siva ratri and the most important, known as *Maha* Sivaratri, was described so far. Nitya Sivaratri is the Sivaratri day (the 14th in each half month) of *Krishna paksha* and *Sukla paksha* in each of the 12 months of the year. The *Paksha* Sivaratri is the period of 13 days beginning from the day after the full moon in the Tamil month of *Thai*. The *Masa* Sivaratri

is the actual Sivaratri day and similar days in the dark fortnights. *Yoga* Sivaratri is the day when the New Moon day *(umavasya)* falls on a Monday; it is also said to be the night when the real yogi retreats into his inner self and is enveloped in an external darkness.

Literature

Varada panditar of Jaffna has stringed together the several legends relating to the Sivaratri worship into a small *purana* in Tamil.

Many of the major Tamil *puranas* have chapters on Sivaratri. For example the *Upadesa Kanda* of Jnana Varodaya (of the early 15th century) deals with this vrata in 25 verses in chapter 30. It mentions the several categories of the *vrata* and gives an account of the celestials and the hunter who observed the Sivaratri vigil and puja and were blessed by Siva. It gives also the classification of the different categories of Sivaratri. Besides it narrates the story of a *pulaichi* a low class woman, who went begging for alms ; a way farer threw her a *vilva* leaf, which she in turn threw aside. It fell on a Sivalinga and this act took her to the heavens.

VASANTA PANCHAMI

This is a great festive celebration special to northern and central India, aad in spirit corresponds to our Pongal. Pongal is a day of thanksgiving while this one is a sort of offering of welcome to the oncoming spring season. Anyway, the spirit of joy and pride is the same in both the cases. As some one remarked, we in Tamilnad have only the three seasons, the hot, hotter and hottest! But in the northern areas the seasons are definitely more marked. We have of course a rainy season but no winter. In North India just as the winter is definitely marked and definitely affects peoples' lives and living conditions, the spring has its own joy and celebration.

The Vasantha Panchami is a popular domestic festival there, celebrated on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of *Masi*

to welcome the advent of the spring. This is celebrated in Bengal, not like our *pongal* but just like the Sarasvati puja in Tamilnad. Sarasvati (as Sri) the Muse of Arts and Learning is worshipped on this day. No reading or writing is done. This is also a public holiday. Worship is done either to an image or picture of Sarasvati or to books etc. in which she is considered to dwell. Even implements of writing are used to deputise for Sarasvati. Priests are invited to perform the puja in the homes. The priest recites the mantras, and food offerings such as cooked rice, sweets and fruits are offered by him. The membersof the household strew flowers on Sarasvati praying to her to grant sound knowledge and learning, specially health, wealth and fame. Hence the concept of Sarasvati as the Sri. Learned people invite their patrons who naturally make gifts of money to the pandit or teacher. This aspect corresponds to the celebration of *Mahar nonbu* in Tamilnad. Generally only men do this puja and women are excluded from it.

In some other places, the spring is welcomed on this day by women in gorgeous dresses of bright yellow, the colour of the fields in bloom. On the whole the festival is more colourful and boisterous. The day is given to fun and frolic and merry making. Kite flying and swings from trees are popular items. In effect, this is a spring festival as its name definitely indicates. Our almanacs mark the day in our *panchangam* as the Vasanta panchami day and hence we are giving this short notice here. However in Tamilnad, the day of the Vasanta Panchami is the day of celebration in honour of Manmata; one of his names in *Vasanta bandhu*, the friend of the Spring season.

THE HOLI

This is principally a North Indian festival, now being known to us also in South India through books and journals and other means of communication like the broadcasts and newspapers. It occurs on the full moon day of the *Phalgun* month which usually corresponds to our *Masi* full moon day. It is essentially a festival of spring when every heart is full of joy and warmth and every heart is open for friends and rela-

tions. Certain elements of a South Indian festivity can be identified with this and so we shall deal with it here at some length.

Probably the *Kaman pandihai* of the South approximates to the Holi of the North. Kaman is Manmata, who shot his love darts on Siva sitting in *yoga samadhi;* when Siva was thus in *samadhi*, a non-acting state, all activity had to cease. So the devas prevailed upon Manmata, the Cupid of Indian mythology, to shoot his love darts on Siva and induce Him to make love to Parvati. But Siva, who was the cause of every thing, knew what was happening and so when the darts touched Him, He opened the central eye on His forehead and lo! Manmata was instantly reduced to ashes by the fire emanating from it. Rati, wife of Manmata, prayed to Siva for forgiveness. He thereupon made Manmata live on and carry on his work on earth, in a form invisible to all, but visible only to her. The burning of Manmata is considered to be the meaning of the burning of the Holi fire.

In most celebrations, a *holi* fire is lit on this day by little urchins. They appropriate any thing from their houses and the neighbours' houses for making the fire; no one dare complain that combustible matter had been taken from his house. A huge bonfire is made in the morning to the cries of *holi* and the holi rioting and colour-throwing commences.

It has degenerated into a carnival of rough sports, obscene songs and midnight orgies. The sports were intended to remind one of the frolics of Krishna. It is celebrated even for ten days, the last three or four being important. The Holi is considered to mark the end of the year. Some fifteen days later, the New year is considered to be born. In the above sense, it is a sort of farewell to the outgoing year.

The festival is a riot of colour; men, women and children all play together, making every one the target of their colour spray. Each has a syringe which contains a coloured water, coloured yellow with turmeric or red with *kumkum*, and on this occasion they sprinkle the coloured water on all people,

including strangers and passers by. This is a sort of all-fools day when no one could take offence at the colour soaking that his neat dress might have received. In the past, fragrant rose water was used with a little colour and people took it in quite a happy mood. They all knew the merry making on this day in this form ard were prepared for it. But some people from the South who do not know it and are not prepared for it, are often caught up in the colour shooting and may have occasion for annoyance. But nothing can be done about it, because the whole community goes berserk and no one can escape it. The dabbing of colour was a matter of mirth and joy in the past and so everyone participated in the mirth making. But in the modern day, this has become a matter of mischief also, when in addition to harmless fragrant water, oil and ink are added by school and college boys, and colours such as black and blue are added in the place of the appropriate yellow and red, and naturally people's dresses get spoiled and require a considerable amount of washing.

Young boys go along the streets with colour smeared bodies, faces, hair and dress, dancing and singing and playing a drum or other such loud instrument, and visit friends and relations. All people are of course prepared for such visits. They come out of their houses and hug the visiting boys and men. The colour and dab naturally gets physically transferred. They also dance and they invite the visitors inside the house to a sumptuous feast of sweets. The boys then go on to the next house and the process of hugging, shouting and eating is repeated endlessly till all of them tire of eating. With a bath in the evening and the washing of the multi-colour painted clothing, the holi is laid to rest. The colour dab does not vanish the same day. It sticks for many days on the body and stays on the clothes for a good length of time.

One legend would say that the holi signifies the slaying of the demon Madhu by Krishna; this is doubtful. There are many others of a similar nature all of which relate it to Krishna. One is that this symbolized the destruction of Putana,

the demoness sent by Kamsa, who tried to feed her poisonous breast milk to Krishna; the child Krishna drained off all the milk and she fell down dead.

Some areas would link the holi with the divine love of Radha for Krishna. He is said to have played the holi with Radha and the *gopis*, throwing colours, dancing, singing and merry-making. It is quite a grand festival around Mathura, the birth place of Krishna. Another legend would connect the holi with the Prahlada story. Prahlada's father was the *rakshasa* Hiranya-kasipu, who declared himself as superior to God. But the son would not accept it and worshipped Narayana (Vishnu). The father's cruelty became so unbearable that Narayana had to intervene. The story is that Prahlada contended that God Narayana was omni present. Hiranya kicked on a pillar and challenged the boy to produce his Narayana from it. Out came Narayana and tore Hiranya to pieces. This is a familiar theme in all the literatures of India.

In the local story, *Holika* was a demoness, a *rakshasi*, sister of Hiranya and aunt to Prahlada. She was given the task of killing the boy. She had a boon that fire would not harm her. On the strength of this, she jumped into the fire with the little boy on her lap. Narayana saw to it that the boy was unharmed by the fire while she was burnt to ashes. The Holi festival in memory of her destruction, came to be celebrated thereafter as the triumph of good over evil.

One legend would say that Holika the demoness, was a baby-lifter. She used to snatch babies and devour them. Somehow in time the people themselves were able to catch hold of her and burn her alive.

The Holi is mentioned in the early texts as *Holaka* and seems to date back from the centuries B.C. In essence it is an expression of jubilation on the advent of spring.

The significance of the term *holi* is yet obscure. Dr. P. V. Kane would derive the term *holika* from *hola* and *raka*; *hola* is a special rite performed for the *sowbhagya* of women and

raka is the full moon. So holi is celebrated on the full moon day. The holy fire is supposed to ward off pests and blights from the crops in the coming year. There is no doubt that this is a great carnival. Probably the name arises from the loud and vast sounds made by the revellers.

Literature

Saint Jnanasambandhar makes a reference in his Pumpavai-ppadikam (2.47.7) to the *oli vizha* of the days of Panguni Uttiram when women offer bath, conduct a festival of songs to the Lord Siva enshrined at Tiru Mayilai Kapalisvarar (modern Mylapore) temple. This *oli vizha* is identifiable with the Holi festival. There is however no mention of Kaman here and it is unlikely that the Saint would have mentioned a festival in honour of Kaman.

We find however, Andal in the Vaishnava canon worshipp-ing Kaman, The very first decad of her songs *Nacciyar Tirumoli* is a prayer to Kamadeva to shoot her into the target that is Kannan :

I shall decorate the entrance to my house
With pure white sand,
Shall have my bath before it is fully dawn,
Shall place thornless twigs in the fire, and
Perform the puja for you, O:Kamadeva !
Aim your flower-arrow dripping honey,
Inscribe thereon the name of Him of azure hue,
And shoot me at the target of Him
Who split the beak of the crane.

Even apart from the allegoric union of the individual soul with the Supreme as in the mythology of Radha and Krishna, our people would see here a communion between man and nature. Nature is now in a beauteous and bounteous state and the carnival symbolizes the spirit of man in union with that nature. The holi riots, according to some, seek to recapture that joy and exciting thrill among humans. The bonfire is said to commemorate the scorching of the three evil traitskama, krodha and moha (lust, anger and delusion).

12. PANGUNI

KARADAI-NONBU AND THE SAVITRI LEGEND

The Savitri legend is one of the most heroic stories of Hinduism. It is the story of a young woman who engaged in a duel of the spirit with the very God of Death and came out victorious.

The Story

The story is briefly told. Savitri was the daughter of King Asvapati, born after years of penance. When she came of age he asked her to choose a bridegroom for herself. Of all princes she chose Satyavan, the son of King Dyumatsena and his queen, who were both blind and were living in exile in the forest, like hermits. Satyavan was leading a life of dedicated service to his parents; Sage Narada told her that Satyavan was fated to live for only one more year. But she was confident of overcoming death and so would not change her mind. The marriage was solemnized and she lived the virtuous life of a wife in the forest, discarding all her costly raiment and jewels. She was vigorously observing a penance praying for long life for her husband. For the last three days of the year, she fasted and continued her prayers. On the fated day, Satyavan returned from the forest after hewing wood, complained of pains in the head and placing his head on her lap, passed away as though in sleep. Yama the God of Death appeared and, taking the soul of Satyavan in a noose, began to return to his Yama loka. When she followed him for long saying that she would not return without her husband, he was much pleased with her strength of purpose and the force of her arguments, and so gave her many boons to the effect that her husband's father would regain his eyesight and his kingdom. Unwittingly he made a slip and blessed her as usual with children. This made her point out to him how, if this boon were ever to become effective, she must get back her husband to herself.

This story of Satyavan-Savitri is famous throughout India aud wherever the Hindu culture has spread. The chaste and virtuous life of Savitri which knew no defeat and which overcame even Brahma's allotted span of life for her husband is a house hold word in every Indian home. Satyavan is an equally known word. As the name implies, it stands for the champion of Truth and along with the name of Harischandra, it symbolizes Truthfulness.

Observance

The *Kar-adai-nonbu* (sometimes known as the *Kamakshi vratam* in some areas) is observed in many parts of India as a tribute to the memory of Savitri of such epic fame. It is a special ceremony attendant with fasting undertaken by all sumangalis (ladies with husbands living) praying for the longevity of their husbands. This is observed at the junction of the two Tamil months *Masi* and *Panguni* usually (14th of March) exactly at the time when *Panguni* starts, be it day or night, when the sun passes from Aquarius the eleventh sign of the zodiac to Pisces the twelfth sign. The *sumangali* ladies of each household fast for the whole day. They have a bath about half an hour before this time and get ready for the ceremony, first by preparing the food offering. The usual *kuttuvilakku* is installed for *puja* and plantain leaves are spread before it, on which the food offerings are laid out. The number of leaves corresponds to the number of *sumangali* women in the home and virgin girls. The whole ceremony is even more important for small girls, as this is meant to be an invocation to Savitri to bless those children with suitable bridegrooms in the future and give them also long life.

An offering made of simple rice and jaggery is placed on the leaves. People are particular to add the pulse *karamani* (vigna) in memory of Savitri's trip in pursuit of Yama through the jungles and desert, where only the *karamani*, the poorest of wild pulses, was available to her for food: this gives the name to the ceremony, *kar-adai-nonbu*. Though it is called an *adai* (cake) it is generally a *kozhukkattai*, a large ball of plain rice flour and jaggery; fruits, butter, betels and flowers are placed on each leaf besides a piece of cotton string dyed yellow in turmeric, and a little *kumkum*. The *aradana* or offering is done

exactly to the minute of the birth of the month of *Panguni*, with the prayer: "I am offering to thee unmelted butter and one *adai*. Please grant me that I shall not be separated from my husband for ever and ever". The ladies bow before the lamp and then apply the *kumkum* to their forehead and tie the piece of string round their neck and the children's neck. Then they partake of the offering presented. This is purely a women's function. Probably when all is over, they may distribute a cake or two among the male members and male children.

An important ritual is the feeding of the cow, which is done next. Part of the food offering is fed to the cow, as also the plaintain leaf which is not thrown away but is scrupulously fed to the cow. There is a Tamil proverb saying *masi-k-kayiru pasi padiyum*: meaning that the string tied at this ceremony will stand the length of time, i.e., the lady will continue to wear it as a *sumangali* for quite a long period; her husband will have such a long life. The purpose is that the string should be prepared in yellow, placed on the leaf, *aradana* done and the string worn round the neck, even during the last moment or the last minute of the month of Masi *(before Panguni* is actually born).

Significance

Apart from the fact that the Savitri legend shows the great esteem in which woman was held in the Hindu society in the past, there are two important features in the ritual which deserve attention: Savitri is the flower of Indian womanhood, the greatest *pati-vrta* in all legend and history. In these days when we are told in schools and public platforms that Hindu society had oppressed women in the past, it is heartening to find the freedom King Asvapati had given to his daughter to choose her own bridegroom and to stick to her choice even when told that the bridegroom's life would be very short. The *nonbu* has been observed from the remote past, by the women only. This also speaks volumes for the freedom of the women. The feeding of the cow is symbolic of the concern and love for all creation, be it human or animal.

Shri Aurobindo has written the story of Savitri into a great epic in English blank verse in about 24,000 lines, which is twice as long as Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It is conceived as a valuable treatise on yoga, setting forth Aurobindo's concepts on Yoga and the Life Divine.

Celebration of Savitri is common to the South as well as to the North India. In the North it is celebrated in May - June and is associated with the banyan tree because it is long lived and wide spread. It is called there *Vata-Savitri* (*Vata* - the banyan tree). The Vata Savitri is a social celebration where many women congregate under a banyan tree in Gujarat and worship Savitri; images of Savitri, Satyavan and even Yama are placed there. It is said to be celebrated on the *pournami* day of *Jyeshta* which has come to be called the *Jyeshta pournima* in Karnataka. Pictures are worshipped with mango offerings, since this is the mango season there.

It is worth while remembering in these days of many women's liberation movements that Savitri in that hoary past had been able to achieve what no man was ever able to achieve. Persons who are under the mistaken notion that women enjoyed no rights and status in the past, should know of this story and of the scriptural injunctions in Sanskrit and Tamil :

matru devo bhava
pitru devo bhava
acharya devo bhava

in the Taittiriya Upanishad, and in the Tamil gnomic poetry, *Kondrai vendan : 'annaiyum pitavum munnari deivam'* wherein the mother is always placed first.

This nonbu is called the Phalguna Gowri vratam by some smartha brahmins. It is of course the worship of Savitri. Eight conch shells to symbolize perhaps the Ashta Lakshmi are placed, decorated with the usual kolam, and puja performed to it. Kozhukkattai is the neivedya.

SRI RAMA NAVAMI

Sri Rama Navami is the birthday of Sri Rama, the hero of the Epic poem, Valmiki Ramayana and other Ramayanas in all the Indian languages. He is the seventh avatar of Maha Vishnu, incarnate on earth to fulfil the promise of his father king Dasaratha and to rid the world of the menace of Ravana. It is celebrated on the nineth day (*Navami*) of the bright fortnight of the Tamil month *Panguni* (*Chaitra masa*, March - April) when Rama's birth star *Punarvasu* (*Punappusam* in Tamils *Geminatrum*) is in the ascendancy. In private households and in all the public temples of Vishnu, the day is celebrated with an elaborate *puja* to Rama. He is invariably attended by Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman; sometimes also by Bharata and Satrugna. There is a profuse chanting of the Valmiki Ramayana, an *aradana* and distribution of *prasadam* to the assembled congregation. Where a professional lecturer (*bhagavatar*) makes the recitation and exposition, it lasts for several days culminating on the evening of the *Rama navami* day. He is then loaded with presents of all kinds from cash to dhoties by most of the congregation. The presents help him to eke out his livelihood for many months.

Many royal endowments have been recorded in important temples for the celebration of the Sri Rama navami festival. Legends would say that Rama built the *setu*, the bridge to Lanka in order to take his *Vanara* allies to fight the forces of Ravana in Lanka. The proverb *Asetu-Himachalam* arose to denote the whole of India. Ramesvaram, the Siva temple at the point close to *Setu* is said to be the shrine where Rama worshipped Siva in order to rid himself of the sin of having killed Ravana who was a Siva bhakta.

Sita is the incarnation of Lakshmi, the giver of all prosperity. She was born at the tip of the plough when King Janaka was ploughing the land, thus signifying the eternal truth that it is only agriculture that is the real producer of wealth.

Devotees often fast on the day and on the next they conduct a brahmin feeding before breaking their fast. Presentation of paddy is also done. Some would keep awake the

whole of the night chanting Rama nama and devotional songs. In temple festivals, it is usual to take out a decorated image of Rama and Sita in procession along the main streets.

Whoever is not thrilled by a recitation from Valmiki? or by recitation of Kambar? or even by a recitation from Tulasidas in North India? Ramayana one of the two greatest epics of India and a great epic even for the whole world, is ageless and Rama the hero of the epic is a hero and an idol of the people to the end of time. *Rama nama* is the name of God as Gandhi understood it and he was never tired of *Ramdhun* - the utterance of the name of God Rama, in community *bhajan* and chorus singing. The name Rama is the mystic symbol or syllable capable of making one forget all the ills of the world and tide over them with poise and equanimity and without pain. Ramarajya is the ideal state which was the India of Gandhi's dreams, where every one worked for the welfare of the community, where every one was happy, where there was no exploitation and where the society looked after the needs of every one.

PANGUNI UTTIRAM

Occurrence

This festival occurs on the full moon day of the Tamil month of *Panguni (Phalguna,* March-April*)*. On this day the moon is generally on the asterism *uttiram (Beta Leonis)*, the twelfth in the series of 27 in the Indian calculation.

The cold season which prevailed during the whole of the two preceeding months *Thai* and *Masi* is supposed to turn into summer from this day.

In the majority of the temples in Tamilnad, the annual temple festival called the *Brahmotsava*, lasting for ten days, has its culmination on this day and hence its importance in all temple worship. The ten days' festival is very elaborate and it is the major event in any Siva temple. Each day's celebration has a deep esoteric significance which it is not possible to expound here. The first day is the flag hoisting. The fifth is the *sapparam* or *teru-adaichan*, when a decorated car on wheel

is drawn along the main streets carrying the image of *Somaskanda* (a form of Siva) at night. The importance about this is that the front of the car is improvised very artistically and ornamentally exactly like a temple tower with the white tender coconut leaves. Local people work at it from the afternoon and finish it by about 10 p.m. when the image is mounted on it and the car is drawn and brought to rest by 6 a.m. the next morning. This *sapparam* is always a matter of pride for the village people. It brings out all the creative talents of the local people and all people including artisans like the mason and the carpenter take part in it. This art is fast fading out because of the urbanization of rural life and because of modern rationalism. May be in the next generation, no one will know what a *sapparam* was like. It cannot be preserved the next day because the white leaves dry up in the morning and shrink out of shape. I shall not say more of this wonderful subject here.

The seventh day's festival is the *Tiruk-kalyanam* the marriage of Siva and Sakti, Knowledge and Power. The eighth is the *Bhikshatana* where the Lord goes about asking the people to give him *bhiksha*, to discard their ego. The nineth is the very popular car festival and the tenth is the *Tirttavari*, ceremonial bath in the sacred temple tank or river. On the whole the festival adds, in every small village, a richness and a meaning to life, a new dimension for the average citizen. The wedding of Siva or Sundaresvara with Sakti Minakshi at Madurai is said to have taken place on Panguni-uttiram.

This festival is universal. Even Mariyamman temples have this festival. It is not therefore necessary to single out some temples for the purpose. There are thousands of Mariyamman temples in Tamilnad and their annual festival occurs for about ten days ending on Panguni Uttiram. Some of the more important temples are Samayapuram (Kannanur) near Tiruchi, Periyapalayam near Madras, Ambakarattur near Karaikkal, another place near Pondicherry and so on. Sacrifices of animals such as cocks and sheep were a regular feature till recently. *Karaham* and fire walking are some other rituals inseparable from the Mari festival. Fire walking is dealt with eleborately in the Appendix.

Legends

Many legends are associated with this festival. One is that the famous story in which Siva descended in Madurai as Somasundara and took Minakshi in whose name the Madurai temple stands, as His bride. This is said to have given rise to what is known as *kalyana vrata* among women on this day which confers all good to the follower, particularly the good of a suitable marriage to unmarried young women.

Dundha a demoness was causing great havoc in the reign of King Raghu; on the advice of Sage Narada the King observed this *Kalyana vrata* along with all his subjects with the result that ultimately he was hable to destroy Dundha.

Another very important popular festival is also associated with this day. It is called the *Kaman pandihai (Kaman* - cupid in Hindu mythology, also called Manmata*)*. Once Siva sat in yogic meditation. Sakti as Uma had gone to Kanchipuram to do a penance. Then love ceased to exist in the universe and procreation had stopped. The celestials were deeply concerned. They asked Kama deva to aim his love darts at Siva so that He may take back Uma and there may be love and procreation on earth. Quite willing to oblige them, Kama deva shot his love darts at Siva so that He may take back Uma and there may be love and procreation on earth. Disturbed, He just opened His central eye in the forehead and looked at Kama. Unable to bear the heat emanating from the eye, he was instantly reduced to ashes. His wife Rati thereupon appealed to Krishna to restore her husband. He directed her to bathe in the Sundara tirtham (temple tank) in front of the temple at Kamarasavalli (a village near Tiruchi). She did so and then got a darsan of Lord Siva and her prayers were granted. Siva willed that he would come alive and perform his function on earth but his form will be invisible to all beings except herself. This is the story of Manmata or Kamadeva. On account of this story he is called the *Ananga*, the Formless.

This story of Manmata is celebrated in the Holi of north India whose lunar month calculation takes it to a day a month earlier.

People in the lower levels of society throughout Tamilnad celebrate the story of Manmata. Generally these have a very small thatched hut which they call the Manmata temple. Here they celebrate a festival for three days. On the last day Kama is burnt; it is called *Kaman pandihai*, Kamutti in the people's language. Now the people of the area divide themselves into two groups, one calling itself the party of Manmata burnt and the other the party of Manmata not burnt (Erinda katchi and Eriyada katchi). They engage in lengthy wordy duets in verse of the ballad type. There are a number of popular ballad type songs on this subject. Sometimes the wordy quarrel used to end in blows also. The next day they go about the quarters of the higher classes and enact before them the drama of Manmata and sing the lamentation of Rati on Manmata's death. People distribute clothing and rice and also money. Thus ends the Kaman pandihai.

That this *pandihai* was a favourite pastime among all the an people at early period is attested by many pieces of literature. Even Andal, the woman saint of Vaishnavism mentions the worship of Kama deva.

This is also a colourful festival in North India where it is immensely popular. There the whole day is spent in great rejoicing. Singing, dances, colour and sound are inseparable parts in the celebrations. Young men go the round of houses, when they are treated to many rounds of sweet dishes.

Literature

Ahananuru of the Sangham period mentions a festival in Panguni which we may equate with the Uttira Vizha. The context is the possible separation of the lover (husband) leaving the lady alone, as he may go away on some unavoidable business or errand. She is naturally quite down cast, her face being now unwashed and dull. Her friend asks her: "Your lover will not leave you behind and go away. Then why are you so unhappy, my dear, that your bright countenance now looks like the festival hall of the Chola capital Uraiyur, the day after their Panguni festival is over?" This festival is taken to be the Uttira Vizha.

Saint Tirujnanasambandhar refers, in his *Pumpavaip-padikam*, to the *oli vizha* (festival) celebrated in Tamil nad on the day of Panguni uttiram. St. Appar also refers to the Panguni uttiram festival celebrated at Tiru Arur in one of his songs on this shrine rather elaborately: "The Panguni Uttiram festival at Tiru Arur was organized well by Naminandi the servant of Siva, whose great feat of burning water in the place of oil is known throughout the land" (4. 102-2). The cue given by St. Appar is later taken up and elaborated by St. Sekkilar in his story of the Saint Naminandi; the devoted service of Naminandi was well known and the Chola ruler who realized his greatness gave him all the materials for the temple festivals and asked him to conduct them and he was conducting the festivals very well (*Periya puranam, Naminandi puranam* verses 19 and 20).

The *Iraiyanar Kalaviyal* commentary (8th century A.D.) mentions three festivals as important for the three capital cities of the three crowned monarchs of Tamilnad-*Ulli vila* for Karuvur (Vanji of the Seras), *Avani avittam* for Madurai (Pandiyas) and *Panguni Uttiram* for Uraiyur (Cholas). The festival thus seems to have been quite popular even in the higher levels of society in the remote past.

Even a greater clarilfication on this festival is given by Sivajnanaswami in his *Kanchip-puranam* : we know Sakti Uma devi performed puja for the Lord, in the form of Devi Kamakshi. At the end the wedding of Siva and Sakti took place here as prayed for by the celestials. The following were the instructions of Siva as Ekambaranatha to the celestials: "Let the ten day Panguni Uttira vizha be celebrated here in Kanchi every year. On the tenth day, the Uttiram day, the wedding festival may be celebrated here." From then on, the wedding function as part of the Panguni festival is celebrated not only in Kanchipuram, but in all the Siva temples.

Addtional importance accrues to the day as it is also the day of the wedding of Sita and Rama and the birthday of the great Mahabharata warrior Arjuna. The word *Oli* is probably the same as what is called *Holi* today in North India.

Tiruk-Korukkai in the Mayuram taluk of Tanjavur District is considered to be the shrine which particularly symbolizes the burning away of Kamadeva by Siva. There is a spot here which yields a white powder of clay said to be the ashes of Manmata. Bronze icons of Manmata are installed in many temples such as this one, Kanchi, the Parthasarati temple in Triplicane and so on. The Chola Emperor Rajadhiraja II (1163 - 1178 A.D.) was present during this festival in Tiruvottiyur.

PART III

OTHER FESTIVALS

OTHER FESTIVALS

Thus far we had made a monthwise survey of some of the important festivals which are celebrated annually on a particular day in the month. The number so surveyed is more than forty, indeed quite a large number. As noted in the introduction, the birth of every month evokes in the Tamilian, as of course in the Indian mind also, a great occasion to which all the family young and old, and man and women alike, look forward with an eagerness. Half the number, i.e. about twenty are major festivals, in which the whole society takes part. Festivals do not make any difference between the sexes, or rather festivals call for a greater participation among the women. Caste or class is no bar. All commuities take an unalloyed pleasure in celebrating the festivals; they had been detailed in their respective places and no repetition is needed here.

Now in this part, we shall be dealing with a number of festivals which have other significance. They are here grouped into a few heads as shown hereunder.

a. Two Periodical Festivals;
b. Plant Worship;
c. Temple Festivals; and
d. Miscellaneous Festivals.

A. TWO GREAT PERIODICAL FESTIVALS

We are concerned here with two major festivals which occur not monthly or annually, but once in a specified number of years or months. Besides they are of an all-Tamilnad importance; nay, their importance reaches even far beyond the Tamil speaking areas. They are the Māhamagham festival, celebrated in the City of Kumbakonam once in twelve years, and the Sanippeyarchi festival, celebrated in Tiru Nallaru, within the Tanjavur district borders. Both Saivas and Vaishnavas alike celebrate them and strangely enough both the festivals are associated with tanks. In all these festivals, tradition and faiht have the upper hand while cold reason and nihilism merely look on, powerless to interfere or influence.

MAHA MAGHAM

Introduction

The greatest South Indian festival is probably the *Maha magham* festival at Kumbakonam in the Tanjavur district on the southern bank of the River Kaveri, occurring once in twelve years. The last festival occurred on the 14th February 1968, on the Masi Magham day and the next will occur in February 1980. The 1968 festival attracted about 15 lakhs of people from all over India and abroad. This festival is similar to the *Kumbha mela* of *Prayag* and the *Pushkaram* of Andhra, but unlike those two, which are celebrated on rivers, the Tamilnadu festival is celebrated on a tank, known always as the *Maha Magham Tank* (in popular language the *mamangham* tank). The tradition in India with regard to sacred places is that the *murti, sthala* and *tirtta* are important and are to be worshipped. Hence, not only temples and the forms of Siva or Vishnu enshrined there, but also the rivers and tanks are considered sacred and efficacious in conferring spiritual merit on the pilgrim. Even a small temple has a temple tank within the temple walls or just outside it called a *Sivaganga* or *pushkarini*, a bath in which is considered, to absolve one of all sins. A large temple may have a large tank. For example *Kamalalayam* the temple tank of the Tiru Arur temple extends over about 33 acres. Similarly the rivers in the place have bathing ghats which also are credited with the same efficacy.

Though this festival may be comparable to the Kumbamela of Prayag, it is basically different in observance. There are no *pandas* or priests here, pitching their tents and trying to draw out as much money as they can from innocent and gullible pilgrims.

The Legend

Kumbhakonam, known as Kudamukku in the Devaram songs, and abbreviated as Kudandai, takes its name from an ancient legend. When the *Maha pralaya* was approaching, Brahma the creator was anxious about the creation of the universe after the *pralaya* (deluge). Lord Siva advised him to

make a pot of clay soaked in *amrita* (nectar), place in it the seeds of all life in the universe and keep the pot on a peak of the Mahameru hill. Brahma did so and in the pralaya, the amrita pot *(kumbha)* floated and reached the site of Kumbhakonam. Siva aimed an arrow at the pot which broke and spilt all the seed on earth. The place where the spout of the pot fell became Kudamukku or Kumbakonam. The nectar in the pot after spreading over the area settled down at a place which thence forward became the mahamagham tank; another place of the nectar is the golden lotus tank *(potramārai kulam)* to the west of the Sarangapani temple here. The Lord enshrined in the temple was Kumbhesvarar, Kumbha lingesa.

The City

In the Tamilnad, two cities are known as temple cities having scores of Siva and Vishnu temples in them. They are Kanchipuram, the capital of the Pallavas during the centuries 3rd to the 9th A.D. and Kumbakonam, the arterial business centre for the three districts, Tanjavur, South Arcot and Tiruchirapalli to this day.

The city now known as Kumbhakonam (kumbha-pot) was known generally in the Devaram hymns as Kudamukku (kudam -pot, mukku-nose). In the songs of St. Appar and St. Tiru Jnanasambandhar (7th century A.D..) this name is the one by which the city is referred to in the Chola inscriptions. The presiding deity of the Kudamukku temple is Kumbhesvarar who is also the presiding deity for the Mahamagham festival. The city Kumbhakonam takes its name from this aspect, Kumbhesvara of Siva. His consort is Devi Mangalambika the giver of all prosperity; Her worship is even today believed to bestow all *mangala* on the devotee. This temple is the largest and the most magnificient in the city and is also the most ancient. Two other Siva temples have also hymns sung on them by the Nayanmar and they are known as Kudandaik-Kilkkottam and Kudandaik-karonam. The Nagesvara temple is the most superb creation of Chola art. It is possible that it was constructed by Aditta Chola (871 - 907) A. D.) who, the Sanskrit inscriptions say, studded the banks of the Kaveri with a thousand temples to Lord Siva,

There are besides three important Vishnu shrines here. The most famous is the Sarangapani temple, whose tower is the tallest in the city rising to a hight of 146 feet. The presiding deity here is known as Aravamudan, on whom the alvars had sung many hymns. It is a well known legend that one song on this temple was responsible for making Nathamunihal to become aware of the existence of the *Nalayirapprabandham* which were in obscurity till his day, and then go to Nammalvar's place in search of them, and finally for compiling them.and making them available to posterity. The Ramaswami temple though not so ancient, has many wonderful sculptures of the Nayak period. The third temple is the Chakrapani temple. There are many other temples of minor importance like the Banadurai Abhimukhesa, Gowthamesa and Virabhadra.

Kumbhakonam is the centre round which we have five shrines called the Pancha-krosa sthalas, shrines which are situated at a distance of five krosas (about 11 miles). The shrines are Tiruvidaimarudur, Tirunagesvaram, Darasuram, Swamimalai and Patalivanam (Karuppur).

Kumbhakonam is a small city about three miles long and two miles broad situated between the rivers Kaveri and Arisilaru its branch, with a population of a hundred thousand and the *Mahamagham mela* is celebrated on the banks of a tank in the heart of the city. It is indeed a marvel how this small place could accommodate about fifteen lakhs of pilgrims on the occasion.

The State Government, the Railways and the Local authorities make all arrangements for rtansportand all safeguard for the health of the pilgrims. Automobiles are stopped some distance away from the city even a few days earlier. Buses cannot enter the city. New by-pass roads for motor transport had been laid out. The railway runs many special trains.

The Tank

The city has many tanks of which the Maha magham tank is the biggest and most important, covering an area of about six and a half acres. It has granite steps on all the four sides leading

from the top to the bed of the tank. There are twenty deep wells in the bed of the tank which supply water to it from their springs. All the holy rivers of India are considered according to the puranas, to have a confluence in the tank on this maha magham day. The *devaram* hymns of St. Appar mention the Kaveri, Ganga, Yamuna, Sarsvati, Godavari, Kumari, Gomati Sarayu and some others. Nine tirttas or nine sacred rivers are said to be present here and they are, besides those mentioned, Narmata and Vegavati. When people go and bathe in the sacred rivers on important occasions, the rivers' sanctity is such that it absolves the people of all their sins. But the rivers accumulate all those sins and they are held to get over them by going over to this city on this day, mingling with the waters of the tank and worshipping Siva here on this occasion, and then returning from this place to their own places elsewhere. The rivers are said to leave behind a part of their *sakti* which enriches the sanctity and potency for removal of sin of the mahamagham tank through the years.

Around the tank, there are sixteen small temples on the top of the steps enshrining a Siva linga each. Govinda Dikshitar, who was Minister for Achutaraya, and Raghunatha Nayak of Tanjavur, in the 16th century constructed these shrines to mark the 16 (sixteen) gifts mentioned in the dharma sastras (the *Shodasadana*). The 16th shrine on the north bank has a 16 pillared hall where Achyutappa Nayak made a *tulabnara* i. e. measured out his weight in gold and gifted away the gold.

The Celebration

Mahamagham is the day on which Jupiter enters the Simha rasi (Leo), the sun the presiding deity of Simha rasi is at the Kumbha rasi (aquarius), one of the houses of Saturn his son, Chandra (the moon) goes to Jupiter in the Simha rasi, the day being the full moon day (*pournami*) with Magha nakshatra and the sun has a full vision Jupiter and Chandra and these two in turn have a full vision of Saturn. This is briefly stated as the day when Jupiter is in simha rasi on the full moon day in connection with the Magha nakshatra in the month of Masi.

The Kumbhesvarar temple and all the other local temples have a *utsava* which commences ten days earlier and culminates

on this day. Special business centres are opened every where and the city witnesses a mass of humanity even a fortnight earlier than the festival.

On the maha magham day, Lord Kumbhesvara is taken out in proeession along with his consort, Sakti Mangalambikai on their Rishabha mount to the northern bank of the tank. All the other presiding deities of the various Siva and Vishnu shrines in the city are brought in a similar manner to their respective places around the tank and stationed in specially erected pavilions. At the appointed hour a puja is performed to Kumbhesvara, a dipa-aradhana, food offering and other adjuncts of the puja are completed. The same process is simultaneously gone through in respect of every deity assembled there. Lastly the Astra-devar of Kumbhesvara is taken by the *archaka* down the steps to the water's edge. The astra deva is the weapon of Siva *(astra*, weapon) made like a trident in copper mounted on a tubular rod or pipe, about two feet in height, with a flat bottom which can be made to stand. At the bottom of the curve of the trident a miniature form of Siva and Sakti in copper is attached. This is now given an *abhisheka* on the bank and then taken into the water and immersed. The archaka holds the Astradeva in his hands and has a dip in the water. This is the moment of bath in the Maha magham tank. The astra devas of all the assembled murtis are given a similar bath simultaneously. The water in the tank is kept at a level of about two to three feet, the excess water if any being baled out by the authorities the previous day in order to avoid any drowning accident to the bathers in the water. When the Astra deva is immersed, the entire mass of humanity which is standing in the bed of the tank, has a dip in the water as best as it could. Only heads could be seen over the entire area of the six acres besides the steps and corridor all along the four sides. There is no room for bending and dipping oneself in the water. But somehow people manage to do it, and some resourceful people bring a *chombu* pot with which they take the water and pour it over their heads.

After dipping, the Astra deva goes to a pedestal at the foot of Kumbhesvara, a puja is made, diparadana done and *prasadam* in the form of the sacred ash is distributed. This ends the

bathing in the Mahamagham tank. All the people then walk up to the Kaveri where again they take a bath in the Kaveri river and thus culminates the festival. People stay on in the place for shopping, sight seeing, visiting temples and so on or disperse and go back to their homes.

The whole place, all its streets, roads, and lanes are a mass of slow moving humanity on this day. No one can make haste or move forward however much he may try - he has only to move with the crowd, and in the direction in which it is moving; not against it. Till the moment of the tirtta, all the human mass will be converging on the Maha magham tank. The moment the *tirttavari* is over, the mass will be surging towards the Kaveri. After the bath in the maha magham tank, the bhakta is enjoined to bathe immediatly in the Kaveri. One can but move in the same direction. After the bath in the Kaveri, there will be some respite. Many people would ford the river, cross to the other bank and then move out in different directions.

In Kerala

We hear of a mamangham having been celebrated in Kerala in the past upto 1755 A. D., once in twelve years on the sands of the river Bharatam flowing through the Tirur taluk. It was originally conducted under the patronage of the descendants of Seraman Perumal on the sandy beach of Tirunavay. The right of the festival was then vested with the King of Valluvanad from whom it was wrested by the Samutrl (Zamorin) with the help of the Portugese. There was always a struggle between the King of Valluvanad and the Samutiri for a right to conduct the festival. With the raids of Tippu into Kerala in 1788 A.D. the festival seem to have been stopped altogether. The festival when in vogue attracted huge crowds from far and near and there was a grand display of all arts, trade and commerce. All Kerala chiefs attended it. It was a festival of twelve days and elephant march was a grand item. However there seemed to be nothing more in it than the pomp and splendour of royalty. Though the name seemed to be the same as in Tamilnad, the significance was not there.

SANIP-PEYARCHI

The time taken for the planet Saturn (Sani) to travel from one sign of the zodiac to the next is considered to be thirty months and the day of the entry into the next sign is called *Sanip-peyarchi*. This day is celebrated as a great festival in the Siva temple at Tiru Nallaru in the heart of Tanjavur district. This is a large village three mlles west of Karaikkal which was a French enclave before Indian Independence. There is here an ancient Siva temple sanctified by the hymns of all the three Devaram singers. The *sthala vriksha* here is the *kusa* grass, *darbha*, and Siva is hence called Darbharanyensvara. Sakti is known by the name of Bhogamartha poonmulai ammai, which has a great historical legend behind it.

Legends

Wnen Saint Tiru Jnanasambandha went to Madurai at the invitation of the Pandiya Queen Mangaiyarkkarasi to rescue the land from the hold of the Jains, they engaged him in a series of bouts, one of which was what is known as the 'ordeal by fire'. Sambandha and the Jains were asked to place on fire a palm leaf scroll on which their religious doctrine was written and the doctrine on the scroll which was not scorched by the fire would be held to be true and victorious. The Jains placed a scroll which was immediately consumed by the fire and reduced to ashesl Sambandhar drew out a leaf from the bundle of the leaves containing the songs sung by him and out came the first verse of his song sung at Tiru Nallaru. It began with the mention of Sakti as *Bhogamartha Poonmulaiyal*. When placed on the fire, it remained fresh and green till the end and the fire was powerless to burn it. From that incident, Sakti at Tiru Nallaru is known by this name.

Many legends speak about this shrine. Seven shrines around Tiru Arur are famous as the Sapta-Vidanga sthalas, i.e., shrines where the Lord's image in the ancient times was not carved by any sculptor. Once the Chola emperor Musukunda Chakravarti destroyed Valasura and installed Devendra on the celestial throne. Out of gratitude, Indra promised to give him anything that he might like to ask, except the *Kamadhenu* (the celestial

cow) the *Kalpakavriksha* (the celestial tree) and Indrani. The Chola asked him to give him the image of Tyagaraja which he was wearing next to his heart and worshipping. Indra was taken aback. This image was something unique and which he was not willing to part with. So he very cleverly had six images made exactly like the one he was wearing and asked the king to choose one, hoping that the Chola would choose a eopy and not the original. By divine prompting, the King chose the original and the right one. Indra now could not go baek on his promise. So he gave him all the seven. The King brought all the seven to the earth, installed the original at Tiru Arur his capital city and installed the six others in six other shrines, one of them being this Tiru Nallaru. So this place has this great sanctity about it.

The town owes its name to the Nala legend. Prince Nala and his story are well known in the whole of India; they are narrated to show the evils of gambling. Nala married Damayanti and in time both of them had to undergo terrible hardships because of the hold of the evil planet Saturn. Even after Nala freed himself from Saturn's hold, his mind continued to be in an unbalanced state. On the advice of sage Bharadvaja at Tiru Gokarnam, Nala came to this place and worshipped Siva. Saturn was afraid to seize him and from that period Saturn is himself staying here worshipping Siva. So this place takes its name after Nala as Nallaru.

Sanip-Peyarchi

The above story of Nala associates Saturn (Sani) with this place. Besides, it is traditional to associate different planets with different important shrines in Tamilnadu: for example Mars (Sevvay) with Vaidhisvaran Koil, Sun with Suryanarkoil, Mercury (Budhan) with Tiru Venkadu and so on. In that series, Saturn is associated with this shrine.

The importance about this place is *Sanip-peyarchi*, the passage of Sani from one sign of the zodiac into another. This occurs once in 30 months and the day of the occurrence is a grand festival in this place, attracting more than a hundred

thousand people to this small place from all over Tamilnad, on each occasion. The Railway runs special trains for the pilgrims

The Siva temple is as usual facing east with the Ambal shrine facing south, in front of the main shrine. There is a special temple for Sani facing east, by the side of the Ambal shrines Sani is black in complexion wearing a black dress, mounted on the black crow. This day witnesses a great importance shown to Sani. A number of special pujas are done for him. During the night he is taken in procession along the streets, on his mount the crow. Sesame is the grain favourite to him. Sesame oil lamps are burnt; a handful of salt is tied up in a piece of cloth, soaked in the oil and is lit in a lamp, using the cloth as the wick. Sesame rice is his food offering.

There are many sacred tanks in the village but one in particular is held sacred on this day. It is located a furlong from the temple and is named the *Nala-tirtta* in memory of prince Nala who bathed in it and had obtained release from the hold of Sani. All people who go to the *Sanip-peyarchi* festival are by tradition required to have an oil bath in this tank. Every pilgrim takes the bath; shops close to the tank sell oil and soapnut powder for intending bathers. The fact of Nala's worship here is immortalized by Saint Jnanasambandhar in one of his songs.

The Tyagaraja image installed by the Chola King in this plaee is called Nakara-Vidanga and his dance is known as the *unmatta natana*. A large emerald linga kept in a box in the temple is one of the sources of attraction here. There is a belief in Tamilnad that Sani's baneful influence is felt by all people for a continuous period of seven and a half years and that no one can escape it. So all the Hindus go over to this shrine sometime in their lives either during Sanip-peyarchi or during some other occasion to worship Sani. They bathe in the tank, perform an *archana* and burn the salt-oil lamp and take part in the Sanip-peyarchi festival.

The same festival occurring once in seven and a half years is considered even more meritorious.

B. PLANT WORSHIP

In Hinduism in general, plants also are one form of the bodies which the souls take according to their *karma* in their process of spiritual evolution towards the goal of liberation from births and deaths and ultimate oneness with God. Hence we revere plants equally as animals and human beings. When primitive man saw a piece of stone under a tree and learnt to worship it as God, the piece of stone in time evolved into the Sivalinga with its vast metaphysical significance and the tree or plant evolved into a *sthala vriksha* or temple tree and commanded from him reverence and worship. Every shrine in the Saiva religion has a temple tree which figures prominently in the *sthala purana* and all the literature on the shrine. The temple tree need not be a tree: it can be any plant - the common grass, the fragrant jasmine and the chrysanthemum or the thorny cactus *(kalli)* or *carissa (kala);* it can be the poisonous *calotropsis (erukku)* and the huge tree like the banyan or the pipal. Plant worship has been very primitive to man all over the world but here in our country we had interwoven it with religion and religious practices. A temple flower garden or *nandavana* is a great religious service which helps one to get salvation. Great saints like Periyalvar and Tondaradippodialvar are associated with flower gardens and the whole series of legends connected with the Tiruchirappalli temple revolve round a chrysanthemum flower garden there.

All the ancient secular literature of the Tamil language is a glorification of flowers as emblems of crowned monarchs, as symbols of the different aspects of warfare and as symbols of love poetry. We shall not enter here into that vast subject.

Now in the religious field, how glorious have been the virtues attributed to the *vilva* tree in Saivism and the *tulasi* (basil) plant in Vaishnavism! The *vilva*, being a tree has been confined to the temples and temple gardens, but the basil has invaded every Vaishnava home and has appropriated to itself a prominent place in the front yard of every home as a special *tulais mada*, calling for the daily puja. Similarly the *asvatta* or pipal tree has come to occupy a place of honour in the village community and its social life.

We shall give below an account of the two, the Asvatta worship and the Tulasi worship.

THE ASVATTHA WORSHIP

'Among the trees I am the Asvattha' declared Krishna. The asvattha, (the pipal tree) called in Tamil the *arasu* (king of trees) is the most sacred tree for the Hindus among all the vegetable kingdom. Our ancients had not found any difference among man, animal or the plants. They knew even from the early primitive days that plants also had life and so did not make any distinction from one creation and another. The grass, the herb and the tree are births, equally as man and therefore the Hindus also reckoned them as entities and not as anything to be ignored or despised.

The Padma purana gives a legend relating to the divine origin of the asvattha. Once, Agni the God of Fire induced by the devas intruded into the privacy of the Supreme Lord Siva and Supreme Mother Parvati. Siva could tolerate anything but not Sakti. She uttered a curse on them that they all become plants on earth. Brahma became the *palasa* tree (butea frondosa), Vishnu the Asvattha tree (ficus religiosa), Rudra the *Vata Vriksha* (ficus indica, the common banyan tree) and so on. The form Vishnu, the preserver of creation as the Asvattha tree, had from then on come to have the greatest veneration and worship.

There is also an unfamiliar tale regarding the Asvattha tree and the two devatas Sridevi and Mudevi (Prosperity and Adversity). At the time of the churning of the ocean of milk by the Devas and the Asuras, Jyeshtha-called Alakshmi or adversity, misfortune (Mudevi) appeared first and Lakshmi, (Sridevi, goddess of Prosperity) appeared next. So from that time the two are called the Elder sister and the Younger sister. The Elder is naturally always shunned by all beings human and celestials: when the Devas gave Lakshmi quite appropriately to Vishnu the Preserver, Jyeshta was angry that the Devas did not arrange for marriage for her who was the first born. Thereupon she was married to Dussala but unable to stand her

evil nature he deserted her, left her under the asvattha tree and ran away. She was grief stricken and Lakshmi took pity on her and appealed to Vishnu to help her. Vishnu told Jyestha that he was the asvattha tree and that she might stay in the tree, get the worship of all people every day except Saturday on which day Lakshmi would dwell on the tree and get the worship. Such it one of the legends connected with the tree worship.

The Asvattha tree is the *Bodhi* tree held in the greates veneration by the Buddhists as the tree under which the Buddha did penance and meditation and received the Supreme Realization.

Arasu sutrutal is a great festival in Tamilnadu and it seems to be an equally important ritual in the Telugu country and North India. The term means circumambulating the arasu tree (arasu the king of trees, asvattha). Going round the asvattha tree is done on a Monday morning when the Amavasya (new moon day) coincides. Usually young ladies who happen to have no child for some years after marriage do the ritual. It is considered to confer fertility on the devotee. Older women also perform it and for them, it is supposed to confer long life on their husbands. Virgin girls do it in order that they may get suitable bridegrooms in due time. They do it in the company of their elders.

The ritual of going round the asvattha tree is generally done to the tree which has been planted at a place of public access such as the river bank or the bank of a sacred tank where they grow to a huge size. Equally importaat, the tree is one to which a wedding ceremony is performed with a *margosa* (vembu) sapling; the two are planted together and after about two years of their healthy growth, the two are "wedded". A sacrifical fire is made to the chanting of the appropriatc mantras the wedding ceremony is conductedby the village *purohit* in the usual manner. This is in hormony with the Hindu concept of the oneness of not only of all humon belngs but of all creation. A fine brick and mortar platform is generally erected round the two trees and the puja is done to the trees on the platform.

Ladies bring water in a small pitcher from the river or the tank and pour it at the root of the trees, on the projecting bark etc. They apply sandal paste, turmeric, the sacred ash and *kumkum* and make a floral offering of worship. Then they offer a *neivedya*, a *dhupa* and *dipa*, and then begin the circumambulation.

The circumambulation is invariably 108 times. To ensure that the counting of 108 is all right, they take with them 108 articles of the same kind and drop them one at a time for one round in a receptacle. After the 108 are over the rounds stop. They distribute the articles to the others, friends and reltives and even outsiders. The articles may be anything. The first time a lady begins the ritual, she takes 108 pieces of the turmeric; the turmeric is considered to be the most auspicious one for all happy occasions. On the second and subsequent occasions of arasu sutral *(asvatta pradakshinam)* they may use any article. The usual articles are a comb, a small miror. a small container of kumkum or other similar ware relating to women. Later there may be things like eatables of a kind - *seedai*, or *murukku* and betel nut, banana fruits, oranges, lemon, mango etc. These are collected and distributed as aforesaid.

The ritual of arasu sutrutal is adopted as a religious rite, as a vrata and there is also a concluding ceremony for it. At the end of some years after several circumambulations say ten or twelve (often 14) which may be spread over about six or seven years, the ritual is ceremoniously completed. A woman who completed it by a completion ceremony may continue it even afterwards or may not. But she should not drop off without the completion ceremony.

The arasu wedding is a great social wedding. The usual *nagasvaram* orchestra is there. New marriage dhoti and sari for the bride and bridegroom are offered for the two trees along with the *tirumangalya*. The articles are presented to the prohit (priest) after the ceremonies. The wedding is attended by all the members of the village who are treated to presents of sandal, sweets, flowers and betels at the end. Sometimes, the organiser gives also a feast. In the past, the ceremony used to cost a

substantial sum. The next circumambulation begins on the conjunction of Monday and the new moon.

The pipal tree belongs to a large family of trees which are large in size and long-lived, such as the banyan (*aal*), the *kallaal* the *itti*, the country fig (*atti*) and some others. Their timber is not used for any purpose expect the making of temple doors and similar large doors. These are believed not to yield to any amount of blows from the axe, since thir texture is not hard wood but is fibrous in nature.

Women who are barren are generally supposed to suffer from an offence to the nagas (serpents) and so they are enjoined to cast some nagas in stone and worship them periodically. Such nagas are generally placed at the foot of the asvattha tree and all women naturally go round them. They are found around almost all the asvattha trees which are worshipped. Milk is generally offered to nagas. Naga pratistha and milk food are supposed to propitiate the nagas and the women thereafter are considered free of the offences or sins (possibly done in previous births) and their fertility restored.

TULASI WORSHIP

Flowers are all important in worship, in the worship of all deities including the aspects of the Supreme Being, be it Siva or Vishnu. If flowers are not readily available, scriptures would say that leaf petals can be used. The leaves of the *Vilva* for Siva and of the *Tulasi* (common basil) for Vishnu are considered to be of the greatest efficacy in the worship.

Very many legends are associated with the *tulasi*. There are two varieties of the plant distinguished by the leaves. The green is called the *Vishnu tulasi* and the purple is called the black *tulasi* or the *Siva tulasi*. Both the leaves have a pungent odour and taste, and are valued in Indian medicine.

Tulasi is the greatest offering for Vishnu. There is a very meaningful legend illustrating this fact. Once there was a wager between the very mischievous sage Narada and Satyabhama, the impetuous wife of Krishna. Somehow she lost the wager and as

a condition thereof she had to give away Krishna or his weight in gold and jewels to Narada in lieu of Krishna. Not willing naturally to lose her husband as a dutiful wife, she chose to give his weight in gold to Narada. So she hoisted a pair of scales, placed Krishna on one pan of the scales and on the other placed all her gold and jewels. She had mountains of golden jewelst She brought them all and placed them on the other pan. But though the gold was in tons, that pan would not go down nor the pan holding Krishna rise up. Satyabhama was extremely perturbed and annoyed. She was not on good terms with Rukmini, the younger wife of Krishna and had always nourished a jealousy against her. But now she decided it better to make friends with her rather than lose Krishna altogether. So she sent word to Rukmini about her predicament and prayed to her to bring all here jewels so that they might at least weigh the scale down, causing the scale of Krishna to go up. But she was extremely vexed and even angry that Rukmini did nothing of the sort. She came to the place of weighment almost empty handed except for a single petal of *tulasi* which she held in her righ. thumb and forefinger. Reaching the place, she took stock of the situation. Satyabhama railed at her for not bringing her jewels. Not heeding her words, Rukmini chanted the name of Krishna within her heart, and holding the tulasi petal in the fingers, went round Krishna seated in the scale thrice, and placed the petal on the heap of jewels on the other scale, and lo! what happened? The scale of jewels dipped down, the scale of Krishna shot up! Krishna could count the heap of jewels light, but he was like a feather before the intense bhakti symbolized by the single *tulasi* petal of Rukmini.

This popular incident is known in the Vaishnava legends as Krishna *Tulabharam* and it had been very well utilized by the great Vaishnava Saint Periyalvar in one of his songs celebrating the placing of the infant Krishna ceremoniously on the cradle in the shepherd's quarters in the Gokulam. On this occasion, all celestial beings send glamorous and costly presents to the child Krishna (a custom which is present even today in all families). Now what present can Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu Himself, is to send this child Krishna (who is an avatar of Lord Vishnu) on this occasion? Probably Alvar remembered the Krishna tula-

bharam story and here says that Lakshmi sent a present of as small garland made lovingly by hand with the fragrant wild growing tulasi petals.

Other legends would say that Tulasi is a bride of Vishnu wedded to her on the day called *Uttana dvadasi* in the month of Karttikai. *Tulasi vivaha* is a festival celebrated in the Mysore and Maharastra areas. There is another legend attached to this marriage festival. Jalandhara was one who could not be easily overcome by the celestials. His wife was Brinda, one of the greatest of *pativratas*. He had a boon from Brahma, that he can be overcome only when a taint attaches to the *partivrata-hood* (chastity) of Brinda. The devas played a dirty trick on her. They showed her a false Jalandhara's head and body separately as though he had been killed. A yogi came there and united the two, which rose up into life. But this was not Jalandhara but Krishna in disguise. Brinda who was grieved at her supposed husband's death, embraced the restored Jalandhara but as this was not her real husband, her chastity got tainted. Realising that she had been duped by Vishnu, she cursed him and gave up her life in a fire. Over her ashes, the *tulasi* plant grews and became a favourite of Vishnu. The soul of Brinda was reborn as Rukmini whom Krishna married and this is the *dvadasi* day.

This day was said to mark the close of the rainy season and the day when Vishnu gets up from his slumber. A puja to Tulasi and a tulasi *archana* are performed in the morning and the *tulasi vivaha* is performed in the evening. The common *nelli* (Indian gooseberry, *amla* or *amalakam*) plays a part in this wedding. Ghee wicks are placed on an odd number of the *amla* fruits and placed with the Tulasi and they are lit in token of marriage. Other rituals attendant with marriage take place. Garlands sugarcane, mantras etc. play a part in the *vivaha*. The article, are distributed among those present.

In the Brahmin community today, the tulasi plant is planted on a pedestal and a sort of house from one to three feet square in brick and mortar is build round it to a height of two feet and a regular worship is offered to it. morning and evening. A lamp is lit; there is a corner for a lamp in the structure of the wall.

Flowers are strewn, light is waved and circumambulation is made. Even if a garden space is not available, this tulasi structure, called a *tulasi madam*, is constructed even in the smallest space in the paved courtyard within the house or outside it. People, men and women, call themselves Tulasi and we know the greatest Hindi poet was Tulasidas, the writer of *Rama charita manasa.*

In the modern day scientists seem to be interested in this plant. Medical research workers are now discovering that the plant from the roots to the shoots is useful in the treatment of snake bite to even mental disorders. It is also useful in bringing down blood pressure. Scientists have found from their experiments with mice that the tulasi leaves will reduce the birth rate. Besides, the leaves contain vitamins and minerals and are available free, in plenty, during all the seasons.

C. TEMPLE FESTIVALS

Temple festivals form a substantial part of our festivities. Many of our festivals are celebrated both in the home and in the temple. Instances are Vinayaka Chaturthi, Sarasvati puja, Ardra darsana and so on. Apart from such festivals there are quite a large number of important temple festivities in which the society or the congregation also takes a great part. The annual Brahmotsava of every temple and the periodical Kumbhabhishekam festival are temple rituals or celebrations which call for the greatest involvement of the community. In a sense, these are really social festivals and because they are done in the name of religion or of a particular form of God, they have assumed the garb of a temple festival while being fully socialistic in their actual celebration. The temple priest or Sivacharya no doubt does the puja and the connected agamic rituals, but the celebration part of it is done by the community and hence the relevance in discussing them in this book of Tamilnadu festivals.

In all these festivals, the people do not stop with a mere *archana* or with supplying the materials. They are fully involved in all arrangements, in getting the flowers, in the floral *alankaram*, in the mounts or vehicles for the procession, lighting, temple orchestra, singing of the hymns, arrangements for the food and fruit offerings, temple decoration and many similar items. All these are not one man's job or one family's job. The whole rural community takes an active part in the various activities. The food offerings are large and they are distributed to the worshippers and the temple servants. Economically speaking, each such festival gives employment to a number of persons, according to the resources of the temple and the duration of the festivals, from a score of men to even a hundred people, men and women.

On the other side, the entire community of men, women and children is eagerly looking forward to the festival for the joy and the feast to the eyes and the ears which it would give and which would well be the talk of the community till the next similar festival comes up. Procession and decorations keep alive the community's sense of art and their capacity to appreciate beauty.

Some of the important temple festivals are discussed below. This is by no means exhaustive. There can certainly be many more of a regional importance. Brahmotsava and Kumbhabhishekam which are universally important in Tamilnad are also discussed here.

ANNABHISHEKA

The Vedas say that Food, the means of sustenance is God:

Annam Brahmeti vyajanat,
Annad hi eva kalu imani bhutani jayanti,
Annena jatani jivanti,
Annam prayanti abhi samvisanti iti.

(Taittitiriya upanishad third valli, second anuvaka, first mantra. "Understand that Food is Brahman: For certainly all beings here are indeed born from food; having been born they remain alive by food; and on departing they enter into food".

Our ancients had always sought to give an outward ritualistic representation for every abstract thought in philosophy. The concept of food as God is sought to be portrayed in the ritual of *annabhisheka* in the Siva temple. The kriya which is considered as Siva's favourite is *abhisheka*[1] - bath, which symbolizes the purification of all external impurities. In this ritual, He who is the Ever pure is given an *abhisheka* with food, the thing that is itself Brahman, God, Siva.

Annabhisheka in the large Siva temples is performed on the Pournami day of the month of Aippasi. In the innermost sanctum, the *Siva linga,* its *Avudaiyar* and the *Pitha* (base) together with all the area around, is cleaned scrupulously well. The floor is scrubbed well and flushed with water several times. Then at the auspicious hour, the cooked rice is brought in and applied on the entire Siva linga.

---

1. Vide the popular Sanskrit verse:
   Alamkara priyo Vishnu, abhishek apriyo Sivah,
   Stotra priyo Brahma, Brahmanah bhojana priyah.

Vishnu is fond of decking; Siva of abhisheka; Brahma of eulogies; and the brahmins of food.

Cooking of the rice itself is an elaborate ritual. The oven is a hand-made earthern oven; it cannot be any of the modern contrivances. There are elaborate rules for the fire-wood-what wood can be used and what should not be used. The vessel is cleaned well, warer from the proper source is filtered and brought by several brahmins and poured into the pot, the fire is lighted and the cleaned rice is placed in the pot, all with the appropriate mantras. When the sanctum has been got ready, the rice is taken to the sanctum.

Several *gurukkal* (*archakas* or priests) participate in the ritual. The cooked rice is poured on the crown of the Siva linga in large quantities so as to cover not only the linga or its *bana* but the whole figure including the *avudaiyar* and its *pitha* (base). The whole now presents a mass or mountain of cooked rice. No part of the Sivalinga is left visible.

Now this mass of rice is considered in its turn to be the Siva linga and all puja is done to this. *Abhisheka* with other materials like milk, honey or sandal is done symbolically. Sacred ash and sandal are of course applied to its crown, the usual floral *archana* is performed, *neivedya* or food offering and *shodasopacara* (the sixteen items of *upacara* or felicitation) is performed and finally after sometime, the rice that now forms the linga is removed and distributed to the devotees as Siva's *prasada* in addition to the customary sacred ash.

In addition to the concept of *annam* (food) as God, as propounded in the Upanishads, there are a few other features which deserve consideration. The Sivalinga is made of stone, hard stone, selected in times long gone by, by experts, both *Sivacharyas* (temple priests) and *Stapatis* (temple sculptors) according to the *Silpa.sastras*. When the hot rice is applied to the linga, the chemical material of the stone reacts to the heat and the organic matter of the rice, and the rice draws into itself some mineral qualities which in turn are considered to have a salutary and curative effect on human beings. Secondly, the linga is not merely a block of stone, but it is also a *mantra* body, where *mantras* have invoked the Divine Presence several times a day through several centuries. The mantras convey a

psychic influence to the devotee through the consumption of the *annabhisheka* rice and generations of devotees have testified to the immense value of the rice on these counts. Thus the *annabhisheka* is a ritual having a deeper significance than what appears on the surface.

Besides, from the sociological view, this is a way of distributing food. Food is first offered to God and then distributed to the people. No part of it is wasted and it was the practice in the past to distribute it among all, free.

The amassing of the large quantity of the cooked rice on the linga - so much food, plain rice, milk white in its dazzling brilliance, and the fresh cooked flavour, is something to satisfy the senses, the eyes and the nostrils of man. In the villages of the past, all activity was food-oriented as testified by agriculture, the largest industry in the Indian sub-continent, and the *annabhisheka* is a grand culmination bringing into unison, food the fundamental primitive physical need of man, and God the ultimate Supreme spiritual need of man.

Great shrines like Tiruvidaimarudur, Tirukkadavur etc. are mportant centres for annabhishekam.

The special abhishekams are done on the *pournami* day of each of the twelve Tamil months and they are in the following order: Chitrai-Marukkolundu, the fragrant *artemesia*; Vaikasi-Sandal; Ani - the three fruits banana, mango and jack; Adi - milk thickned by boiling with sugar called *tirattip-pal;* Avani - sugar; Purattasi - *adirasam,* rice-jaggery cake; Aippasi - *annam,* boiled rice; Karttikai-ghee; Marhali-honey; Thai-oil; Masi-*kambalam,* wool; and Parguni - white curds. The twelve are given out in following Tamil verse :

கொழுந்து, சந்தனம், கூறிய முப்பழம்,
அழுந்து பால், சர்க் கரைபணி யாரமே,
தழைந்த அன்னம், நெய், ஒழுகு தேன்,
இழைந்த நெய்ப் பொதி, கம்பளம் வெண் தயிர்.

The temples adopt these to the extent they have resources in money and material.

A small portion of ihe annam is offered to Chandesa as *Siva nairmalya naivedana* and that is consigned to the sacred river or tank.

Chidambaram is the place where *annabhishekam* takes place daily. They have a *spatika linga* there to which annabhisheka is performed every day at noon. St. Appar sang here that Tillai-Chitrambalam bestows on us food, annam, (*annam palikkum Tillai Chitrambalam*) and so probably the annabhishekam has been considered to have a special and daily significance there.

There is a proverb saying that to one who had a darsan of *annabhisheka*, the affliction of hunger will not be for one full year.

The special name of the consort of Sakti for Lord Visvanatha at Kaśi is *Annapurni*. Kasi (Banaras) is the *mukti kshetra;* there is no *mukti* for one who is always hungering for food. So here Annapurni first gives the food and removes the hunger of the physical body, before one becomes fit for liberation spiritually.

A sociological meaning may also be read into the annabhisheka in Aippasi. In Tamilnad, this is a rainy month; there is also a proverb saying that the rains in Aippasi will be unceasing - *Aippasi adai mazhai.* During the rains the poor people will have no work and so no wages. The annabhisheka might have been intended to give some food by way of *prasadam* from the temple to the poor people of each locality.

SANKHABHISHEKAM

This is one of the important and picturesque festivals in many of the affluent Siva temples of Tamilnad. The festival occurs on every Monday (four and sometimes five) in the Tamil month of *Karttikai*; it is popularly known as *Karttikai Somavaram* (Monday).

1008 conches (*sankhu*) had been gathered and kept in the temple from days immemorial. The conches are usually left-winded. But there is one *sankhu*, much larger in size than all

the rest, and that is right-winded; this is called the *Valampuri-sankhu* (the right-winded). This is a rare phenomenon and naturally prized high. *Sankhabhisheka* is simply anointing or bathing the Sivalinga with the waters contained in all the 1008 *sankhus* individually.

Naturally the display of 1008 conches filled with abhisheka water in an orderly manner will occupy considerable space. So there is a special *mandapam* or decorated central hall where all the *sankhus* are assembled, placing the valampuri on a pedestal in the centre. A *homa* is performed on a sacrificial fire, spiced water for abhisheka is stored on a large vessel and it is sanctified with the appropriate mantras. The sankhus are arranged in squares of five (twentyfive in a group) and they are filled with the water in the vessel. The usual pujas are performed to the sankhus and then the Sivalinga *abhishekam* commences.

The *sankhus* are taken in procession along the inner courts of the temple and finally they are deposited in the *sannadhi*.

Many priests are employed for the purpose of carrying the water filled conches from the hall to the central shrine. The water in each *sankhu* is poured over the Sivalinga, to the accompaniment of Veda recital and Devaram recital. With great ceremony and reverence, the *valampuri sankhu* is emptied and the other items of the puja go on, a colourful *dipa-aradhana* is done including of course the sixteen *upacharus* and finally *prasadam* is distributed. After the *abhishekam*, the *sankhus* are taken away and stored for use the next year.

Many large temples have this festival. The *Sankhabhishekam* at Tirukkadavur, Tirupunavasal etc. are great events in the locality, attracting thousands of worshippers. The *abhishekam* on the last Monday is specially a gorgeous temple festival.

The sankhu is one of the three celebrated vessels or containers of water for the *abhisheka;* the three are *sankham* (conch), *sringam* (the horn of the rhinocerus) and the *sahasra dara patra* the sieve as having holes for thousand showers).

TEPPOTSAVA

Known as the float festival, this is a very popular festival in temples which have a tolerably large temple tank. Mylapore, Tiru Idaimarudhur, Kumbhakonam, Tiru Arur and many such places have such festivals, both Siva temples and Vishnu temples celebrate it. Each temple has a particular day in the year on which this festival is celebrated. In some places it is the Thaip-pusam; in some others it is one of the days of the brahmotsava.

The significance of the *Teppotsava* may be symbolic of the Grace of God which helps man to cross over the seas of *samsara* effectively and peacefully and reach the haven of God's feet. But normally, it is a grand display of light and colour and beautiful decoration, the whole thing being in motion. The procession of the Lord's image along the streets during the various festivals is also a gala celebration in motion; but that is on firm land, while the float festival is on water.

The float is not made up of real boats; it is made of innumerable mud pots of uniform size, inverted and tied together by bamboo poles all along the edges and along the rows. This is usually called a *parisal*, a float made up of pots. In places like those west of Tiruchi and those on the River Coleroon in the eastern reaches far removed from masonry bridges, the *parisal* of pots is the normal means of crossing the river. The air space in the inverted pots builds up a pressure due to the weight of the material and men mounted on the pari-sal and the thrust of water underneath through the open mouth of the pots. This bottled up air in the pots buoy up the float for the duration of the festival which lasts a whole night. The deities, decked beautifully in garments, flowers and jewels, and placed in decorated *vimanas*, the priest standing by and offering puja - food offering and karpura aradhana, and the *nadasvaram* orchestra consisting of at least half a dozen men with their instruments, are there. Then the Veda brahmins, the *Devara oduvars* and a number of important persons of the place along with a large number of children are there. In all, the load carried by the float may total up to about four tons. All the time the *nadasvaram* is playing and the Veda brahmins and *oduvars* are reciting their songs. The float was tastefully illu-

mined with petromax lamps in the past but now is done with multi-coloured electric lamps. The float will actually appear like an illumined hall with all its accompaniments of men and music floating on water.

It is a glorious sight for all people to enjoy and store its memory till the similar day of the next year. At every corner the float will go near the bank. Worshippers will bring their offerings of flowers, fruits and food besides coconuts and camphor, board the float, see a karpura aradhana and then depart. All this takes time and it is almost daybreak when the float returns to the starting place. Fireworks lend sound and jubilance to the celebration.

PRADOSHAM

The thirteenth day of the dark fortnight, *trayodasi* in the *Krishnapaksha*, is specially important in the Siva temple worship and this is called the *pradosha* worship. It is done elaborately in large temples. The period of half a jama (or one *muhurta*, an hour and a half) before sunset and the same period after sun set everyday is called *pradosham*, i. e. from 4-30 to 7-30 p. m. The early part before sunset is even more sacred. It is particularly sacred on the *trayodasi* of the dark fortnight. There is a legend dedicating this period to the worship of Siva, particularly of His mount Rshabha at this hour.

When the ocean of milk was churned for obtaining nectar, first there emanated from it the deadly *halahala* poison which just scorched everything before it. At the prayers of the devas, Lord Siva agreed to swallow it, as otherwise no place in the universe could contain it. He called his attendant Sundara to collect the poison. By the grace of Siva, Sundara rolled up the poison into a ball and brought it to Siva; hence Sundara himself came to be called Halahala Sundara. But the ball itself burnt down every thing and unable to withstand its intense heat the devas fled. Pitying them in their flight, Rshabha deva, the bull mount of Siva, gave them shelter under his own outstretched tongue. Siva swallowed the poison and kept it in His throat which became black because of it and thenceforth He came to be

called Nilakantha. So when the devas offered their prayers out of gratitude to Siva, He declared that since the Rshabha first gave them protection, they should thereafter worship him first and then only worship Siva Himself on this day. The swallowing of the poison occured during the period just before sunset on the *trayodasi* day which happened also to be a Saturday. Thenceforth, the *pradosha* worship came to be an important ritual in the Siva temples.

The *pradosham* occurring in the months of Chitrai, Vaikasi, Aippasi and Karttikai is considered to be specially important, Saturday of course being most auspicious.

Siva is the soul's soul and so when He swllowed the poison, He decreed that it should not harm the souls; He was then silent and motionless for some period. This was the *ekadasi*, the eleventh day after the full moon. The devas had all fasted on this day and worshipped Siva. They broke their fast on the next day, *dvadasi.* On the next day, Siva performed a dance called the *Sandhya nrukta*, with the *damaruka* (drum) in His hand, standing between the two horns of the Rshabha, and Uma witnessing the dance. The dance was intended to confer happiness on the devas and all beings. During this period of dance all the devas are witnessing the dance. 'Sarasvati plays the vina, Indra the flute, Brahma sounds the cymbals, Lakshmi sings, Vishnu sounds the *mrdanga* and other devas are crowding in all directions to witness the dance'. Puranas in Sanskrit and in Tamil sing the stories of persons who performed the *pradosha* worship and obtained Siva's grace.

A special form of ritual is prescribed for the worship on this day and it is called the *Somasutra pradakshina. Pradakshina* is circumambulation of Siva in the temple, in the clockwise direction, *Somasutra* is the spout which lets out the *abhisheka* water from the *garbha graha.* One who circumambulates the temples usually ends with the worship of Chandesa as the last item. Today's particular form requires that he should not cross the *somasutra.* Hence the worshipper worships Siva in the *garbha graha,* then Rshabha in front of the temple and then goes to Chandesa, not in the clockwise direction but in the anti-clockwise

direction worships Chandesa, then again returns by the same way to Rshabha, worships him and leaves the temple. This is the *Soma sutra pradakshina*. On this day the food offering is made to Rshabha by placing the food on his tongue, which had protected the devas from the Halahala poison in the past. Great merit is said to accrue to the person who offers worship in the temple in this manner. Special icons in bronze are installed in all the temples called the Pradosha-nayaka, where Siva will be found to clasp Umadevi unto Himself with His left hand.

PAVITROTSAVA

This is an *utsava* performed in all large temples for the purpose of rectifying any omissions in following the agama injunctions in the matter of festivals, pujas etc. during the whole year. The meaning of the term *pavitra* is given as *pa*-failure (to follow); *vi*-prescribed rules; *tra* - to protect or restore. During the festival, wreaths made of cotton or silken yarn dipped in turmeric water are placed on the deity and this is known as *pavitra-aropanam* (placing). Failures or deficiencies might have occurred in *mantras*, rituals or in materials. To make atonement for these failures this festival is conducted. This is also called the annual *prayaschitta* (making amends) festival. There are daily festivals called *nityotsava;* the *dolotsava* or swing festival; and special festivals on *amavasya* days, *krittika pradosham* and the day of the birth of the month. The *prayaschitta* covers deficiencies in the observance of the festivals on all of these days.

A *punyahavacanam* or *pavitrotsava* is done in major temples even daily. This is intended to atone for irregularities and lapses occuring in the temple worship and temple rituals every day. This is a very simple ritual but the annual *pavitrotsava* is an elaborate one lasting for even six days in the major temples.

It is done during any one of the months Ani, Adi and Avani, beginning on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight.

Tiru Jnanasambandhar calls this the *Perum-santi utsavam*, in the tenth verse of his *Poompavaip-padikam*.

The *pavitrotsava* is also equated with the placing of the sacred thread on the Sivalinga on this occasion. Siva is of five forms, Isana, Tatpurusha, Aghora, Vamadeva and Sadyojata. These are known as Pancha-Brahma forms. Just as the sacred thread investiture is made for a brahmin boy on the *avitta* day in the *Sravana* month, it is performed for these Pancha-Brahmas on this day. The five are invoked in their usual places with all the attendent rituals and the sacred thread is placed. (*Pavitram* - sacred thread).

BRAHMOTSAVA

The Brahmotsava is an annual feature in all Tamil Nadu temples, Siva, Vishnu or minor deities. The festival takes places usually for ten days, ending on the Panguni Uttiram day. Some major temples have the festival on different occasions and even more than once. For example, the festival in the Nataraja temple of Chidambaram takes place in connection with Ardra Darsanam in Marhali and with Ani Tirumanjanam in Ani. So also in Sri Rangam, Tiruppati, Madurai and similar other places. On all the days of the ten day festival, the chief deity is taken round the main streets, called *mada vidhi* or car streets, (the streets along which the temple car is drawn on the nineth day of the festival) at night time, brightly illuminated with lamps and accompanied by the *nagasvaram* orchestra and the singing of the Vedas and the Devaram or Nalayiram songs as the case may be.

In each shrine, the brahmotsava or the ten day festival is said to have been inaugurated by a celestial being in the remote past - such as Hirayana varma in Chidambaram, Brahma in Tiruppati, Musukunda Chakravartti in Tiru Arur etc. It is history that Rajaraja Chola constructed the Big temple of Tanjavur and organized an annual festival there of over thirty days.

The ten day festival is almost identical in all the temples and it follows a set pattern. The first is *Kodi-yetral* or *dvaja-rohana*, flag hoisting; there is always a flagstaff outside the *sannidhi* to the top of which the banner of Siva, having a picture

of His mount the *Rishabha* is hoisted after due rituals. The priests who officiate in the temple on this occasion should not leave the station uutil all the ten day celebrations are over. On this day Siva gives a *darsan* under the temple tree (*sthala vrikshu*); this symbolizes cosmic Creation. On the second day He mounts the Suryaprabha and the Chandraprabha and goes on a procession along the main streets. This symbolizes the second function of Preservation. On the third day, the mount is Adhikara Nandi and Bhutavahana, signifying dissolution. The fourth day is the palanquin and the *Naga* (serpent) mount, denoting the fourth function of Obscuration. The fifth day is a grand event. Siva goes round mounted on the special chariot called *sapparam* specially devised for this particular night's function. This is known also as *Teru-adaichan*, since it is constructed as wide as the street itself. It is constructed in the evening and most tastefully devised and decorated like the frontal appearance of the temple *gopuram* (tower), only with the help of the tender white coconut leaves and palmyrah leaves and the dark green mango leaves. This is a highly skilled work of art, which employs only local talent irrespective of caste or creed and no one was hired to do this work for money. The chariot is drawn along the four main streets round the temple at night and brought back in the small hours of the morning. The entire village community takes part in this preparation and celebration. A large crowd of people from far and near gathers to witness the beauty of the *sapparam*.

The sixth day is the elephant mount. The seventh is generally the *Tirukkalyanam*, the symbolic wedding of Siva and Sakti in each temple; this is a very elaborate and important festival which again signifies the preservation of the created world. The eighth day's festival is equally important : it is the *Bhikshatana* form, when Siva goes out in the form of a beggar inducing the souls to cast off their ignorance and ego. But how many do it ? The nineth day's festival is the crowning glory of the Brahmotsava, this being the day of the car festival. Siva along with Sakti, in the pattern of the Panchamurti's (Ganesa, Subrahmanya, Siva, Sakti and Chandesa) is mounted on a chariot or several chariots, where the resources of the temple permit it, and

goes a round of the streets. The temple car is drawn with two stout ropes, often about twenty feet long, all people, men of all ages, creed and castes tugging at it. The proverb was that for drawing the car, no one was taboo ; in fact *untouchability was taboo* on this particular day and celebration. The mirth and joy of the festivals are at their highest on this day. Vast crowds, of children and women, gather and the streets are just a sea of humanity. Pedlars, petty shops and children's merry go-rounds ply their trades with hilarity. Children have a great liberty on this day in respect of food and pocket money, and unchecked freedom to roam about. The tenth day ends the festival. On this day, the deities are taken to the temple tank and the *Astra deva*, the weapon power of Siva, is given a ceremonial immersion in the tank All people have a simultaneous bath in the tank. Then the flag hoisted on the first is lowered, and this concludes the Brahmotsava.

The Vishnu temples also follow the same pattern. They have the usual flag hoisting, the car festival and the *tirttavari* and the flag lowering. The mounts and the taking out of the deities vary. They have the Surya and the Chandra prabhas, the Garudavahana, the *Vennaittali* (Krishna the child stealing the butter from the Gopi's houses,) the Kalinga narttana, the Hanuman vahana, the horse mount, and the *tirttavari* or the avabrithotsava.

All these festivals are taking the Lord even to the doors of the devotees themselves and aim at making even those, who had been denied temple admission, have a darsan of the Lord at close quarters on a number of occasions and derive joy and satisfaction and solace. This had helped in the past to retain a cohesion in the Hindu community to a considerable extent.

KUMBHABHISHEKAM

The term *Kumbha-abhishekam* simply means anointing the Lord in the temple (*abhisheka*) with the *mantra* water from the *kumbha* (pot). The saying is that Siva is fond of *abhisheka* and so Siva and His temple are given the *abhisheka*.

Alamkara priyo Vishnu,
abhisheka priyo Sivah,
Stotra priyo Brahma,
Brahmana bhojana priyah.

Vishnu is fond of decoration, Siva is fond of *abhisheka* (bathing), Brahma is fond of *stotra* (praise) and the brahmin is fond of food. Hence *kumbhabhishekam* is done only in a Siva temple and not for a Vishnu temple; in the latter case the corresponding ritual is known as *samprokshanam* (sprinkling with water). So all such rituals are associated with water and with *mantras*. Brahma usually has no separate temple and so the question does not arise in his case. *Kumbhabhishekam* and *samprokshanam* are both a ritual of re-consecration of the whole temple and of the deities therein. It is also performed when a new temple is constructed and is consecrated. The Sivalinga or other deity installed in the sanctum is just a piece of stone newly carved and installed. The installation is not mere placing of the image in position. Vedic mantras are chanted, *homas* are performed a number of times, six, four or two in a *yagasala* and *kunda* of the appropriate size and shape, in front of the requisite number of pots of water, entwined outwardly with a piece of thread and containing scented water covered by mango leaves at the centre of which a coconut is placed. The water in the pots is considered to have acquired great potency through the *yagas* and the *mantras* chanted. At the end of the number of occasions of *yagasala* puja, two four or six as the case may be, the pot is carried by the Sivacharya reverently around the temple corridors (*prakaras*) and then ceremonially poured over the *vimana* or tower over the censer on the cupola. This pouring of water is the *kumbha-abhishekam*. The potency of the deity is thus sought to be transferred from the *mantra* water in the *kumbha* to the *vimana kalasa*, or the deity inside the sanctum) in this manner. This is consecration, From then onward, what was the sculptured stone comes to divine life as a deity and daily *pujas* begin to be performed for it and the whole becomes thereafter, a consecrated temple.

This is in respect of a new installation and consecration. The same process is adopted in respect of a temple, which may have become old and dilapidated and requires repairs. For the purpose

effecting repairs, the divine potency existing in the deities, images and vimanas is drawn out into the pots of water by means of *mantras* and a physical drawal of power is also sought to be effected by connecting the image in the sanctum with the pot of water by means of a string made of *darbha* grass. After all lhe *kumbha* pujas are over, the potency is re-transferred physically by drawing the power from the pots into the image by the same string of grass and esoterically by the *abhisheka* of the *kumbha mantra* water on the image.

The Kumbhabhisheka is a very rare event. Because of the preparation and materials involved, it has become very costly. The nature, variety and number of the firewood (*samit*) used to feed the *homakundas*, the number of *kundas* depending on the number of images and *vimanas* to be consecrated, the varieties of pulses, fruits, ghee and other materials to be dropped into the *agni* in the *homakunda*, and their various quantities and measures are all clearly specified in the *sastras*. For every *kumbha*, there may be scores of esoteric *parivara devatas* and *vastras* have to be provided for all of them. Then for each *kunda* there is an officiating priest as well as a director or guide. There is a general over-all director. The feeding of all these *Sivacharyas* for three or four days, the presentation of *dhotis* etc. for them for the occasion and then the remuneration —all these will be quite a huge amount.

Hence *Kumbhabhishekam* is not an easy affair. Although a *Kumbhabhisheka* is prescribed once in twelve; years it takes quite a longer time, even sixty years. Hence participating in one such and having a darsan is said to absolve man of all sins and give him salvation. Hence a kumbhabhishekam in even an insignificant temple gathers a very large crowd of people of all classes. On the night of the festival, the *Panchamurti* procession is usually organized. The *nagasvaram* orchestra, *Devaram* singing, Veda recital, and fire works, not to say the very elaborate decoration of the processional *murtis*, all together constitute the greatest attraction for the people, men, women and children. For the major shrines people collect from hundreds of miles away and camp in the place for several days.

THE CHITRAI FESTIVAL AT MADURAI

A gorgeous festival of Tamilnadu temples is the one at Madurai, the second largest city of the State celebrated in the month of Chitrai during the full moon day. This is in honour of the wedding of Sakti Minakshi (meaning the fish-eyed; comparison of the fish to the beautifnl eye is a Tamil literary convention.) with Lord Siva as Sundaresvara is done here in this month as a ten day festival. Siva and Sakti from the Minakshi temple at Madurai and Lord Vishnu as Alahar from Alaharkoil, about seven miles from the city limits go over to the river bank. The entire route is decorated with the *mandapam* or resting places. The temple car is drawn along the four Masi vidhis of the city. The deities are all decorated with costly jewellery and it is certainly a grand sight.

Vishnu goes over here from the neighbouring temple of Alaharkoil in the name of Alahar (the handsome). This temple is at the foot of a hill, having a small waterfall known as *Nupurah-Gangai* (the Ganges from the anklet); the stream is known as as Silambaru, meaning the same. The temple is sanctified by the hymns of many Alvar and also possesses other minor poems like *Pillai-Tamil* and *Kuravanji* in its honour. Higher than the Alahar temple is the temple of Muruha on the hill. In the Vaishnava hymns this place is known as Tirumal irum-solai, while the Saivas would hail the place as one of the camps of Muruha, in the name of Palamudir-solai.

Tonsure ceremony is conducted here for young children in honour of Alahar and the devotees offer cows and bulls and paddy to the temple.

ADIK - KARTTIKAI

Karttikai occurring in the month of Adi is important in many of the Subrahmanya shrines, chief of them being Tiruttani, about 50 miles west of Madras. It is a hill shrine on a trunk road, in the North Arcot district. One of the six camps of Muruha is known by the name of *Kunru-tor-adal* (dancing on every hill) and Tiruttani is considered to be the first of such hill stations of Muruha, the other places being Tiruchengodu, Mayilam, Kundrakkudi, Viralimalai and so on.

Tiruttani temple now attracts a large numer of pilgrims all the year round and this feature has made it quite affluent. The story about this place is that the rage of Muruha against the demon Surapadma was pacified only in this place. (Tani-to pacify; the place is Tiru-Tanihai.) Since He is in a peaceful mood, He is also in a mood to grant the devotee's prayers.

Saint Arunagirinathar has sung many Tirūppuhazh and other songs on this place; so also has Ramalingaswami. It is said that Muthuswami Dikshitar the great Sanskrit musical composer (1776 - 1835) was blessed here by Lord Muruha.

The Adi Karttikai is important in this place for its *teppotsava* (float festival) conducted in the tank called *Saravanappoyhai* (where the six sparks from Lord Siva's countenances took shape as Muruha) at the foot of the hill. A festival on the first of January has gained importance in the modern day as a temple festival. The temple has 365 steps leading to it from the foot of the hill and a festival called *Tiruppadi vizha* is done by devotees by gathering at the foot of the hill and celebrating the ascent step by step with Tiruppuhazh songs and *aradana*. Carrying a *Kavadi* is an important item of penance for any Subrahmanya shrine, particularly for Tiruttani. As much as even a hundred thousand travellers with Kavadi reach Tiruttani on this occasion from the northern districts of Tamilnadu close to Telugu and Kannada borders. Along with the simple *kavadi*, there were other gruesome forms also in the past, which have now ceased to exist. Worship of Idumban, as servant of Muruha here, is also considered important.

ARUPATTU MUVAR FESTIVAL

Arupattumuvar are the sixty three Saiva saints mentioned by Saint Sundarar in his poem *Tiru-Tondattohai*. Their lives have been elaborately written upon by Sekkilar in his *Periyapuranam*. After the writing of this *puranam* (c. 1145 A.D.) stone images and bronze icons of the saints had been installed in the major Siva temples in the Chola period and later and worship is being offered to them there daily. The saints belong ot all ages of history upto 700 A.D. the date of Sundarar, to all

classes of society the harijan ranking as equal with the brahmin to all professions; they include a number of women; they hail from all the areas of Tamilnad. A few hail from areas beyond the Tamilnad boundaries; one belongs to an alien religion. There is the one great harmony of love and devotion to God in this heterogeneous group.

The famous Kapalisvarar temple of Mylapore in the heart of the City of Madras performs a great festival for the 63 individual saints and for the nine groups of saints mentioned by St. Sundarar, on the eighth day of its annual brahmotsava. This happens to be the greatest temple attraction in the city of Madras for ages past. On the day all the saints (their bronze images) are taken out in procession along the main streets of the temple, which surround the banks of the temple tank. The images are decorated handsomely in flowers and cloth. More than a score of *manjams* are in use (*manjam* is a sort of canopied conch on which the deity is placed when taken out in procession). Some of the saints are placed singly in the *manjam* and some others in groups of two, three or four. All around the tank is a surging sea of humanity. The entire Madras turns out to witness the festival. Fireworks, *nagasvara* music and *devaram* singing by the oduvars are sources of attraction for the different classes of people and children. The procession lasts the whole night and all traffic in Mylapore is suspended. Women and children of Madras have been living only for this moment and even in these days, when cricket matches compel the Government to close down their city offices for the day, the festival is still going strong infusing joy and peace in the ordinary people. The day is a day to remember for the rest of the year. After witnessing the whole night procession, people go back to their houses as distant as Tiruvotriyur in north by buses which begin to ply by dawn.

Such a great festival for *all the saints* is not conducted on such a grand scale in any other shrine. This is a welcome reminder to people holding aloft the banner of love and sacrifice in the name of God as evidenced in the lives of the ancient saints.

D. MISCELLANEOUS FESTIVALS

We would like to mention here a few more types of festivals which have not been dealt with under the part Monthly Festivals, or under the forgoing subheads of other festivals. The modern literary festivals and the modern national festivals have all come into prominence on the dawn of Indian Independence. They are here treated under the respective snbheads.

Vidai muhurtam, the first paddy sowing by the entire community on an auspicious day, is still a great festival.

A subhead on some ancient festivals now unknown but found mentioned in classical literature has also been added.

VIDAI - MUHURTAM

In every village in Tamilnad the *Vidai muhurtam* is an important social event. The term means "the auspicious festival of sowing paddy seeds". The village purohit fixes an auspicious hour for the ceremonial paddy sowing ceremony for the entire village on a day, well in advance of the period when the irrigation channels and rivers may be expected to carry their flood waters. The day is immediately after Akshaya trithiyai. On the evening previous to that fixed for the sowing, the muhurtam is notified in the village by tomtom. The village drummer announces it by tomtom along all the streets of the village. The hour is usually an early morning one just before or just after sunrise.

On hearing the announcement all those who own lands in the village, prepare for the next morning function. Coconuts, betels, rice, fruits, lamps, sandal, turmeric, incense and the like are prepared and kept ready. Early on the morning of the day fixed, the drummer group goes the rounds of the village streets thrice, to awaken the people and get them ready. On the third round, they follow him, one by one carrying all the items necessary for the purpose. All the people get together at a common place usually in front of the village temple Pillaiyar koil, Mariyamman koil or Sivalaya. Early in the morning a special abhishekam and puja are performed for the deity there,

The people then go to the piece of the selected temple land at the north-eastern corner of the village. A pot of water is taken by each family or group. There, a piece of land had already been prepared for paddy sowing. Here every family has a puja for Vinayaka invoked on a piece of turmeric or sandal as usual, the offering of treacle-mixed rice, fruits etc. is made to Him and then each person sows some paddy in the field and waters it. Small quantities of all the varieties of paddy which are expected to be sown that year are taken and symbolically sown. The people return to the temple, have a darsan of Vinayaka or Siva as the case may be, and then return home. The treacle mixed rice is there distributed to all the persons, agricultural labourers and workers. Thereafter each family commences the cultivation on any day suited to it without caring much for an auspicious day.

The vidai muhurtam can thus be seen to a social event in which *all* the families participate. It is also an occasion when they exchange their experiences on the crops to be raised, the pests and their control, irrigation problems, prices, fertilizers and manures etc.

FIRE - WALKING

Fire walking, called in Tamil *ti-miti* is one of the popular festive rituals associated with minor deities such as Mariyamman in the whole of Tamilnad. The Mari cult takes many names such as Selli, Kurumari, Mahamayi, Maha mari, Sitala devi, Kannudaiyal, Kathayi, Ponni, Nagammal, Nadi, Modi and a host of others. Names like Sitala devi may appear high sounding but for all that Mari is just a minor deity, a tutelary deity who is always kept on the outskirts of the village proper and never allowed entry into the Siva temple. It is not possible to enter into the origins of the Mari cult or its association with Renuka and Draupadi. Draupadi according to the Itihasa came out of the fire and it is of course appropriate to associate the fire-walking ritual with Draupadi. When an obscure Mari was fused in popular lore with Draupadi, the fire-walking was also undertaken in her honour to propitiate her and invoke her blessings.

But one thing should be carefully remembered. Kali is not Mari; Kali is an aspect of Sakti like Durga. This aspect was

assumed for a definite purpose and Kali is installed, unlike Mari, on the inner corridors of a Siva temple in many places. The famous shrine of Kali is Tillai Makali at Chidambaram who contested with Lord Nataraja Himself in the Dance. Fire-walking also takes place in the Kali temple festivals but this does not make the two one. Kali was the aspect of Sakti, who came out to destroy Darukasura. She has mention in *Silappa-dhikaram* and *Tiruvachakam*.

Now, fire-walking as a ritual related to a temple festival is found throughout Tamilnad. It is no doubt a primitive rite, which does require a considerable amount of devotion, courage and dedication but it is not a gruesome one like *sati* (death of a wife on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband) or like a human sacrifice, said to be prevalent in many parts of India even some decades ago. But fire-walking is a rite undergone willingly by many and witnessed by thousands.

I shall not here theorize about fire-walking. Suffice it to say that it is there, undergone by very many people who represent a cross section of society. Men and women do it, old and young, the orthodox brahmins and the lower classes, the educated and the illiterate, the believer and even the scoffer. For the moment the scoffer does convert himself into a believer, by undergoing all the rigours and disciplines prescribed for the devotee. No one is able to say what makes such different types of people do it and bear the burning heat, but they do it and no body has complained of any burning of the soles of the feet. All people walk through the fire with a smiling countenance, and even those who start with some hesitation and fear end up with smiles and peace.

The occasion for a person to walk the fire is some calamity or dread disease in the family to overcome which he or she prays to the deity and says that she will undertake the fire-walking and prays for succour in the calamity. She ties up a rupee coin (it was a prestigious silver coin in the past!) in a piece of yellow cloth as a sort of contribution to Mari. The amount is taken out and given to the temple on the day of the fire-walking.

The fire-walking ceremony is generally on the last day of the Mariyamman temple festival of ten days which culminates on Panguni uttiram. During all the ten days, the pujari goes round the streets carrying a *karaham* (brass pot, decorated with flowers. and woven round with thread and filled with scented water into which Mari has been invoked with *mantras*). This pot represents Mari. The pujari stops in front of each house where a *dipa-aradhana* is done to the karaham as to Mari. *Margosa* leaves profusely adorn the pot as well as the pujari. The image of Mari is taken out on a mount usually the swan mount *anna vahana*, every night for the ten days. It goes not only along the main streets, but also along every nook and corner where there may be a worshipper waiting with coconut and fruits for an *aradana*.

This itself is a great departure from orthodoxy because Siva in his various procesions does not go out of the ordained main streets (car streets). The Mari and similar deities are democratic; they go along every street where the feet of man can go, his shoulders carrying her. Probably this relaxation in the case of Mari and others had been resorted to from the example of Vishnu. The images of Vishnu as is well known do not stop with the main streets. They go on picnics, called *vanabhojanam* and go several miles to distant water fronts, the river and the sea, camping in several places on the way, as Lord Bhuvarahaswami, Lord Vishnu at Sri Mushnam, does even today. Mari merely copies the ritual from Vishnu.

The arrangement of the fire pit is said to require expert skill. Any one cannot make the fire. It is traditionally men of the carpenter class in the rural parts who are skilled in this through hereditory practice. The pit is about ten feet in length and about three feet wide, with a depth of nine inches. All and sundry wood cannot be used for making the fire. Twigs, leaves, etc. should be removed. Good logs of the black babul (acacia) type is brought down in suitable sizes and the pieces are burnt in the pit. This is commenced about two hours earlier than the time fixed for fire-walking. All ash and small cinders are removed. The persons in charge beat down the logs

a uniform size, so that the top surface is generally even, without any small fires and is a glow of bright red, without any white or black surface.

The fire-walking takes place generally in the afternoon by about three p.m. or even a little later. The *karaham* goes round the temple itself and all the walkers follow it. They are generally in clothes dyed yellow in turmeric water and hold in their hands bunchcs of margosa leaves. Some have them even round their necks. Some even have a large mud bowl of fire in their hand, placed over some margosa leaves.

Just at the end of the fire pit there is a pit of water, about three feet wide and two feet long. even with the fire pit, and it is kept full of water. The first walker pujari is there with the *karaham*. He walks gently with measured steps and from looking at his face one cannot say that he feels the burning heat, in his feet. Others follow, many in equally measured steps, some in a gentle hurry; there are some who rush, out of a psychological fear and may be even out of a burning feeling at the soles of the feet.

The day previous to the day of the fire-walking, the walkers follow a routine of intense personal discipline. They eat only light food, non-vegetarians eschew meat on the two days, and married people live separate. Needless to say they worship in the Mariyamman temple on as many occasions as they can. Intoxicants are of course taboo; no tobacco in any form. People sleep on a bare floor or bench as a measure of penance. This kind of physical discipline helps them also to evolve some mental discipline, which is able to overcome actually the heat of the burning embers. An armlet *kankanam* or *kappu nul* in yellow, is tied on the right arm of the fire-walker with a rhizome of turmeric wound in it. Through the centuries fire has been seen not to scorch 'those who have undergone this preparatory discipline including the *kappu*. But fire had been seen to burn and blister the soles of those who enter the fire without undergoing this discipline on the previous day. It is also common knowledge that scoffers and unbelievers have been severely burnt.

On the day of the fire-walking, they have an early morning bath, and fast till the ritual is over. As the *karaham* goes forward there is loud drum beating and a sort of frenzy works up among the dedicated. There is a general fear that any slackness in the discipline will result in the burning of the feet during the walking.

Following the pujari the walkers walk in single file spurred onward by the weird beating of the drum and by the beating of the *udukkai* (a kind drum tapering in the middle) in the hands of the pujari. Of course he chants the names and bhajans of Mari and also lines from the *Mariyamman* ballad.

Some walk as if in a trance and as they cover the fire pit, they are taken into the arms of friends waiting on the other side. The only *prasadam* for them is the sacred ash and the *kumkum* distributed by the temple priests. Fire-walking *ti-miti*, is said in some areas to be *poo-miti*, walking on flowers! For most of the unmarried women, who undergo what to others is an ordeal, it is indeed not a fire-walking or ordeal, but really a *poo-miti* or flower-walking.

Fire-walking appears to have spread to the countries where the Tamil people had migrated for business and trade. In such places the local people seem to have copied the ritual and are found to be doing it even now in worshipping their own deities. For example, we find it in Kualalumpur not only among the Indians but among the Chinese also. The Paradise Temple of that city (lin Thien-Kong) has a fire walking, Chinese people, more than 100 men at a time dress themselves in white as a symbol of the purity of their vow at the moment of worship, walk across charcoal fire bare-footed, carrying the images of their Chinese gods and chanting their prayers for pardon of their sins.

LITERARY FESTIVALS

The lives of great poets and the occasions of literary importance and celebrations in the past have a claim on us to be celebrated as important literary festivals. The authors of *Tirukkural* and Kambaramayana have been celebrated for some time

now. The two are hailed quite appropriately as the greatest poets of the Tamil language. The *Mattuppongal* day (the 2nd of Thai) has been fixed as the day of the author of *Kural* said to be Tiruvalluvar and the day on which Kambar published his Ramayana in the shrine of Lord Ranganatha, *Hasta* of Panguni, as the Kambar day. The days of both are celebrated very elaborately in all the districts.

A few other such important poets and their days may be mentioned here, to help those interested in celebrating them as festivals. The foremost of these is naturally Subrahmanya Bharati, whose anniversary of death is celebrated on September 11th; this may also be called a national festival for Tamil nad now since his songs had contributed to the national resurgence in a very great measure. It is a pity that his songs have not yet caught on the imagination of the people at the all-India level, because of the language barrier. No poet of the modern day has fed the fire of a national upsurgence first kindled by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya by his *Vande Mataram* song which was just a song of the hermits in his novel *Anandamatham*. Little could he have dreamt at the time that the song of the sannyasis written by him in the course of a novel could have such far reaching consequences in the 20th century as to serve as the *Mula Mantra* or slogan for a freedom struggle on the Indian sub-continent among three hundred millions of people. The Tamilians are naturally proud that Subrahmanya Bharati took up the mantra *Vande Mataram* and elaborated it. No where in India, including Bengal, have the literary songs of any poet helped the fighters in the freedom fight as the songs of Bharati had done in Tamilnad. At a time when persons weae ruthlessly persecuted for uttering the phrase *Vande mataram*, Bharati had sung many songs with *Vande mataram* as their theme, and as the opening phrase.

There are three places in Tamilnad which are important for the festivals of a religio-literary character conducted there. One is Sikazhi in the Tanjavur district, the birth place of the Saiva Saint Tiru Jnanasambandha. He had a visitation of the Grace of Siva at the age of three and from that moment he burst into the most delicious song. The event is celebrated in the local temple as a great festival known as the

Tiru Mulaippal utsava. The festival celebrates the event of the feeding of milk to the child Jnanasambandhar by Sakti. The *Vaikasi Visākam* is a great festival in Alvar Tiru Nagari in the southern most part of Tirunelveli district in honour of the birth of Nammalvar there. He is the author of *Tiruvaymoli*, the fourth thousand in the Vaishhava canon of the four thousand songs and it is held even in greater reverence than the Vedas by the Sri Vaishnavas. A special twenty-day festival is held in Sri Rangam in honour of Tiruvaymoli. Equally great is the birth day festival of Sri Vedanta Desika, the originator of the Vadakalai sect, at Tiruvahindrapuram in the South Arcot district. The elite of the sect gather there on this day and celebrate the utsava in a manner which has no equal anywhere in the whole of Tamilnad. Desikar is the one acharya in Vaishnavism who has sung twenty philosophical treatises *in the Tamil language* besides a hundred in the Sanskrit language. These three festicals are today temple festivals honouring religious acharyas.

Among literary festivals of the modern day may be mentioned those of Saint Arunagirinathar all over Tamilnad, and Ramalingar at Vadalur on the Taip-pusam day. Arunagirinathar, the magician with words and sound is, slowly coming in to his own and there are celebrations in every city by many institutitions founded to sing his songs and popularize them. The name of Muruha has a great appeal in the resurgent Tamil world and celebrations in his honour are bound to gather greater momentum. Ramalingar, the bard of democratic religion is becoming popular and his poems are read now and gorgeous celebrations in his honour are held in the city and elsewhere by many enthusiasts.

NATIONAL FESTIVALS

Evolution of a nation and the impact on it of different nations with different cultures, languages and history, naturally ushers in different lines of thinking and different patterns of living. When a subject nation like India, with its numerous languages, caste systems and similar institutions and, what is more, with its unbroken long and glorious cultural heritage' emerges as a free nation and evolves in independence and sovereign nationhood, and when new political patterns of demo-

cracy and a new socialist way of living emerge, pushing out millenia-old rule of monarchy, naturally new occasions of importance in its national rejoicing are born. Many of the olden days of importance generally get forgotten and are dropped out. November 11 as the day of the armistice on the end of the First World War in 1919 was a great day of public celebration in all schools, public offices etc. in the past. We remember the old days when a gun shot was fired from the Fort St. Georage at 11-00 a m. on November 11th to commence a two minute silence and another shot at 11-02 to end the silence. But it was naturally forgotten in the wake of the great upheavals bursting out after the Second World War. Whoever can now remember the Delhi Durbar Day when George V was crowned at Delhi as the Emperor of India?

It is therefore natural that the Indian struggle for Independence and the very dawn of Independence should have introduced a number of new festive days of all-India importance which can be considered as National Festivals. The most important of the days is the day of Indian Independence when, on the minute the 15th of August 1947 was born, Lord Louis Mountbattan lowered the Union Jack and hoisted the Tricolour flag on the Red Fort at Delhi.

There has never been any darkness in our cultural history as we find in the West. There, the earlier culture was one which took after the Greek and the Roman. Immediately afier the whole land was overrun by uncultured tribes like the Huns who destroyed all the culture that was there, a period of complete darkness had set in and a score of generations had lived there which never knew what culture was. Then came the period of renaissance in all the nation's life and activity. This renaissance however ushered in a new culture, the Christian culture, a totally new one. So the people's break with the past was complete. They did not have any culture, civilization, literature or art which could be called ancient. All their study of culture, civilization and history had only an anthropological value. They did not have any living traditions which can go back, say to two millennia, because there was no continuity.

Of no less importance is the 26th of January 1950 when our elders drafted the Constitution of India by which India was declared a secular sovereign Democratic Republic, recognising certain fundamental rights of the Indian citizen and granting adult franchise to all the citizens of India. This was a great step in popular democratic government, an experiment which no other nation on earth had tried to adopt then or now. Subsequent events in the Indian sub-continent had made thinkers even doubt the wisdom of such a step but the step had been irrevocably taken. This day is also a day of annual rejoicing.

But yet what a great tragedy that the fundamental duties were forgotten!

The birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, the half-naked fakir according to Winston Churchill, and the great mythical person, according to Einstein, 'who always pitted the dignity of the simple human being against the brute force of the west and invariably came out successful', is celebrated on the 2nd October every year as one of the great national festive days. There are any number of local regional festivals which are important only to that particular region. But these three are days of great rejoicing and festivity for All India as no others are.

RIVER-BASED FESTIVALS

Civilization in Tamilnad as in India and elsewhere, has been a river-based civilization and naturally therefore we have here a number of celebrations which are river-based. Foremost among them all is the *Adip-perukku*, which is a festival of homage done to the River Kaveri which 'feeds its children with its thousand hands even when seasonal rains fail'. This is done on the morning of the 18th day of the Tamil month of Adi, all along the banks of the Kaveri and its tributaries in the delta area. This is a social festival.

The *Kadai-mulukku*, on the last day of the month of Ayppasi, being a ceremonial bath in the Kavari at Mayuram, is another such festival equally important for people of the area in particular and people all over Tamilnad in general. A similar

Kaveri like Kuttalam in Tanjavur district. Occasions like the new moon days (*amavasya*) in *Adi* and *Thai* are considered equally important for the river bath. These are religious festivals.

Sea baths on several occasions are also observed with similar reverence. The *Indira vila* at Kaverippattinam (Puhar) in the hoary past was a social festival at the waterfront but it had been forgotten. The *Masi magham* is such a festival today celebrated on the sea coast and also on the river banks in the Kaveri areas, where deities, particularly Vishnu, are taken over long distances in a procession for a sea bath.

These are no doubt religious festivals but have become more social in observance because the Lord God, who had been kept in seclusion in the temples, is now taken out, sometimes over long distances, so that all the people including those who had normally no entry into the temple can now have a *darsan* of the Lord and worship Him; in a sense God goes out to meet His children who had been denied admission to His presence. This speaks volumes for the elasticity of religious practices in the Hindu religion which is usually accused of being wooden and caste-ridden.

Sea baths and baths at the confluence of the river and the sea have been prescribed for many occasions such as the two *amavasyas* and *Masi magham* mentioned above. *Ardhodaya*, sacred conjunction of the Sun and the Moon (*amavasya*) at sunrise on a *Sunday* in Thai with the *sravana nakshatra* and *vyatipata yoga*, and *Mahodaya* day, the same conjunction on a *Monday* are equally important sea bath days.

There are besides very grand festivals for the *Maha magham* once in twelve years at the Mahamagham tank in Kumbhakonam. This is comparable to the *Kumbha mela* of the north and attracts large crowds of people from all over India. The last *Maha-magham* festival in 1968 attracted about four hundred thousand people to this small town and to the banks of its small tank.

The *Sanip-peyarchi* festival at Tirunallaru requiring a bath in the *Nala tirtta* (temple tank dedicated to the planet Saturn), once in thirty months, is also a grand local festival which attracts large crowds from all over the Tamil nadu.

Now coming back to the rivers, ceremonial river bathing has an all-India importance and it seems to have been an all India cycle where one month has been set apart for one particular river, so that pilgrims who desired to go a round of the sacred waters of the rivers could have a regular schedule of touring. This is called a *pushkaram* festival. The pushkara cycle occurs once in twelve years and it is the day on which Jupiter (Brhaspati) enters the particular zodiacal group. For the people of Tamilnad, the *Maha magham* occurring in the Tamil month of *Masi* (Kumbha or Aquarius in the zodiac) is familiar. The Magha nakshatra of Masi is the day on which Jupiter enters this sign and the last occurrence was in 1968. Similar occurrences are celebrated in the areas of different rivers with greater or lesser importance once in 12 years as here. The belief is that all the sacred rivers converge on the particular river or tank at the specified time. So far as *Maha magham* is concerned, the Maha magham tank at Kumbakonam (Kudamukku and Kudantai in Tamil literature) is virtually the Kaveri, as all the waters of the delta here are the Kaveri water. St. Appar has sung beautifully that all the sacred rivers abide in Kudamukku on this day.

It has been stated that the abiding of the rivers continues for 12 days from the Magham festival; the abiding lasts only for a few minutes during midday on the other days of the year.

The following is the schedule of the celebrations with reference to the rivers in India. *Chitrai* (Mesha, Aries): the Ganges. This is the *Kumbha mela* of Prayag (Allahabad). This *mela* is celebrated in four different places once in three years so that the complete cycle of 12 years again comes back to Prayag - Haridwar, Nasik, Ujjain and Prayag. *Vaikasi* (Vrshabha, Taurus); Narmada. *Ani* (Mithuna, Gemini): Sarasvati. *Adi* (Karkataka, Cancer): Yamuna. *Avani* (Simha, Leo): Godavari (Vriddha

Ganga). Here the Pushkaram at Rajahmundry is quite famous; the last one was in 1967. *Purattasi* (Kanya, Virgo): Krishna (Krishnaveni); here the Pushkaram at Vijayavada is equally famous: the last one was held in 1969. *Aippasi* (Tula, Libra) Kaveri ; this is the famous *Tulamuzhukku* at Mayuram, culminating on the last day *Kadaimuzhukku* famous throughout Tamilnad. *Karttikai* (Vrichika, Scorpio) Tamraparni. *Marhali* (Dhanus, Sagittarius): Sindhu, the Indus. *Thai* (Makara, Capricornus) Tungabhadra. *Masi* (Kumbha, Aquarius); Kaveri and the Mahamagham Tank celebrations at Kumbhakonam. (A river Bhimvati is mentioned.) *Panguni* (Minam, Pisces): Tapti. Of the twelve, only some are being celebrated and that too not on a grand all-India scale. Nothing is known about some others.

Just like the Kaveri, the river Vaihai is also famous and is celebrated in Tamil lore, legend and literature. *Paripadal*, the anthology of musical verses of the Sangham period, is reputed to have had 70 verses but only 24 are available. Of these, nine happen to be in praise of the River Vaihai. Verse 11 mentions very elaborately a festival as *Tai-niradal* where young virgin girls take a ceremonial bath in the river, under the watchful eyes of their mothers. This festival, *Tai-niradal* has latterly come to be identified with the *Pavai-nonbu* or *Markali niradutal* which is the subject of the two *pavai* poems in Saivism and Vaishnavism (9th and 8th centuries).

However, in popular lore, we do have still this *niradal* festival in the month of *Chitrai* (though not in *Tai* or *Marhali*) in respect of the river Vaihai. Sri Alahar (Vishnu as the Handsome) enshrined in the neighbouring temple of Alaharkoil (Tirumalirumcholai of the Vaishnavas and Muruha's Palamudirsolai of the Saivas) goes to the River Vaihai on this day mounted on a steed. The *descent* of Alahar into the waters of the river Vaihai is a great festival in the neighbourhood of Madurai. People from the working classes in particular gather in tens of thousands on this day for witnessing the festival and for having a dip in the river on this holy occasion. Alahar is always *Nam*-Alahar (our Alahar) to them on this day; it may be remembered that Vishnu is called *Nam*-perumal in Sri Rangam and the names of one Alvar and two acharyas in Vaisnavism are *Nam*-

Alvar, *Nam*-Jiyar and *Nam*-Pillai. The festival occurs on the waterfront in the city of Madurai and the like of it in size and pomp is not witnessed by Madurai. The legend connected herewith is that Alahar is now going to Madurai to give over His sister Minakshi in wedlock to Lord Sundara (Siva) of Madurai. Another version would have it that Alahar is returning after the marriage in Madurai function is over.

SOME ANCIENT FESTIVALS

We learn that there were four important festivals in the Tanjore temple which ran to 34 days. The annual *Brahmotsava* went on for nine days. The first day was the day of the temple flag hoisting and on three other days Nataraja was taken round in the usual procession. The birth day of Rajaraja was celebrated for twelve days and it was the *Sadaya* festival, the natal star of Rajaraja, in the month of Chitrai. Karttikai was an one day festival, while Sankaranti was a twelve day festival; it may be remembered that Sankaranti or Pongal is a four day festival in the modern day.

Many festivals had been conducted in Chidambaram such as the *Ani Tirumanjanam* and the *Marhali Tiruvadirai* festivals. These are significant in this that they represent the Cosmic Dance of Nataraja. Tiruvadirai is the Ardra festival, celebrated even in the days of the *Devaram*. *Aippasi pura vizha* was a festival for Sakti like the *Adippuram* in all the temples and it could have been the same as the Pali-telittal Tiruvizha when cereals are allowed to sprout and the sprouted grains are placed on the lap of Sakti; this is symbolic of the belief that Sakti as the mother of all creation causes all joy and good fortune to sprout for mankind. (*Pali* is the sprouting of the traditional nine varieties of cereals known as *navadanyam*).

There was the familiar sea bath festival in the month of Masi. There is one *Tiru-ppudiyatu Vizha* when Sakti was clothed is new garments. We are not sure if this was the same as the modern Dipavali which is a universal day of new clothes in India. We learn that the Adi 18, Adipperukku, was also a festival, from the fact that one Muthukrishnappa Nayak had

built a *Tirtha Mandapam* on the banks of the River Coleroon (some 4 miles south of Chidambaram today) for the stay of Lord Nataraja on this festival day.

Besides there was also the important *Thaippusa Vizha*. This seems to have been a major festival, quoted with what is now known as the Annap-pavadai. This consists of spreading a wide white sheet of cloth on the *Kanakasabai* floor in front of Nataraja and spreading on it beautiful white cooked rice, as a food offering for Nataraja. Later all this rice was do led out to the poor and the indigent people as well as temple servants as Nataraja's *prasadam*.

Iraiyanar Kalaviyal commentary mentions three festivals. Enumerating the obstacles in the way of the lover going and having a nocturnal meeting with his love in a clandestine manner; it says that during important festivals, the entire town is awake because of the festival celebrations and these are a hindrance to his visit. The writer mentions three such festivals relating to the three capital cities of the three crowned monarchs of ancient Tamil Nadu. They are - Madurai Avani Avittam, Uraiyur Pankuni Uttiram, and Karuvur Ulli Vizha. The three are the capital cities of the Pandiya, Chola, and Sera Kingdoms.

This Avani Avittam festival is now unknown; it is not of course the *modern* Avani Avittam festival otherwise known as *Upakarma*, when the twice-born have a ceremony of renewing their sacred thread and having a new investiture for the young boys of seven years, the significance being that they are initiated now into the spiritual wisdom of the vedas. This is merely symbolic among the brahmin community today and nothing further happens. Of course this could not have been a popular festival involving the entire community of Madurai in the past.

The second is the *Panguni Uttira Vizha* of Uraiyur, the capital city of the Chola Kingdom. This day is even today the day of the annual festival in all the Tamilnad temples, not only in the Cholanad but all over, even in the Pandinad and in the Tondainadu. Hence we may say that this was really the festival celebrated in the days of the writer.

The third is *Ulli Vizha* of Karuvur, in other words Vanji the capital city of the Seras. We do not know anything about it now. The Ulli Vizha is also referred to in Ahananuru (verse 368). When the maid of the heroine speaks to her referring to the visit of her lover even during the day time, she refers to this vizha. 'Your love affair is becoming a scandal in this hamlet like the Ulli vizha, when the people of Kongu (Kongar) wind girdles with attached bells round their waist and dance along the streets.' Through this detailed description of this festival we are unable to say what the festival was in that remote period. However an explanation can be offered. In the Tamil language *ullalam* is a dance with singing, mentioned in the classic literature. It is possible that the Ulli vizha is the same as Ullalam. Again the letter is a general term and not a particular or proper noun. We may believe that the modern *Onam* festival of Kerala is the same as this *Ulli vizha* or perhaps a modification or development of it. We do not know what the legends connected with the Ulli vizha were, although we know that a modern Onam is connected with Mahabali. But Karur is now acknowledged to be the ancient city of Vanji, the capital of the Seras and hence the Karur Ulli Vizha, a festival of the Sera country, could be equated with the Onam festival which is a unique popular festival for the entire Keralanad.

An *Ashtami Vizha* seems to have been an important festival of the past. This was celebrared in the month of Chitrai. When Jnanasambandhar apostrophizes the damsel Poompavai, in her ashes, he refers to this festival. He asks, "Wilt thou stay away without witnessing the *Ashtami* festival at Kapalisvaram, celebrated by the eighteen categories of the devas?" St. Appar gives some more details about this. Siva enshrined at Tirukkurukkai-virattam is considered to have reduced to ashes Manmata the god of love. "Here all the devas worship and utter His praises. He went out in procession along the streets as Nataraja on each of the seven days previous to the holy *Ashtami*." Thus this tells us that the festival was celebrated in those days for eight days (not ten as at present) beginning from the first day after new moon. We do not know any other details

about the festival. This was probably the annual festival for eight days which had come later to be known as the *Brahmotsavam* and transferred to Panguni Uttiram.

Ashtami in the month of Purattasi is important in the Vaishnava tradition as the birth day of Sri Krishna; it is there known as Gokulashtami and Janmashtami.

An *Astami pradakshina manmiyam* is known to be a Sanskrit *purana* which glorifies the circumambulation of the temple of Minakshi and Sundaresvara at Madurai.

On account of such importance attached to this day, it was considered a sacred day and was a holiday for the schools of the post-sangham period. It was a day of religious festival and penance. However in the later days, the significance of *ashtami* seems to have been lost.

The ashtami is even now held to be important to Sakti in Bengal. The ashtami in the bright fortnight following *Janmashtami* is held in the north to be the birthday of Radha. The ashtami of Chitrai mentioned earlier is the Asokashtami in North India symbolizing freedom from sorrow. The Ashtami Agrahayana (Karttikai) is celebrated there as goshthashtami, dedicated to the cows, like our own Mattuppongal.

Vizhavu in *Purananuru* 33 is interpreted in the commentary as *Sivasotru Vizhavu*, a festival where curds and rice are mixed into (what is known in modern language as, bagala bath and the mixed rice in the form of rice balls are given away to every one that attends. Perhaps this refers to a practice of giving free food to people who congregate in times of great temple festivals and the like from distant places.

The Indra vizha of puhar (Kaveripattinam), the capital of the Cholas two millennia ago, was perhaps the greatest of the Tamilnad festivals. It was a state festival, announced by the state drummer on elephant back beating his drum and inviting the citizens to celebrate it, under the king's orders. It was an annual festival, and celebrated in such a grand manner that not only people from the other states but even from the celestial

regions, came to the city to witness the glorious celebration Both the epics *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimekhalai* sing the glory of the celebrations. The festivals culminated with a picnic of the entire city at the sea front. The legends say that, because one King forgot to announce the festival when he was struck with grief over the loss of his child at sea brought by a merchant from his lady love in Nagaland named Pilivalai, Indra was greatly enraged and he caused the city to be washed away by the sea. When the city was thus lost, all vestiges of the festival had also been lost. Today we may equate the *Bhogi pandihai*, celebrated in honour of Indra on the day previous to *Pongal*, with the Indra vizha of the past. However, *Pongal* has all the importance and glamour, while this Bhogi is merely an adjunct to that greater festival.

VANA MAHOTSAVA

This term figured prominently in the news and public life immediately after Independece and now survives merely as an annual utsava to garland some high offical of government in the name of tree planting. All this planting business had become government-oriented, meaning only urbanization and publicity. A tree cannot thrive on publicity or urban macadanized roads. Not one ever cared what happened to the saplings once planted. It is well known that rainfall is closely related to forests and no where have any steps been taken to make the landscape green in all areas. A lot of window dressing is done in the name of Vanamahotsava all along the routes of the ministers' tours. Every one knows the fate of the plants planted on such occasions. The people know, the officials know and the top dignitaries also know that all this sums up to nothing. They know that they are celebrating *vanamahotsava* in the same village in the same piece of land for the nth time! If all the *vanamahotsavas* conducted so very expensively had resulted in the production of a few trees at least every year, the Indian nation would be living in the midst of green groves and arbours and thick forests. Instead, India continues to live amidst barren and dreary land with practically no green colour to give some relief to the eye.

All this ineffectiveness has been there because planting had not beenrelated to the spiritual or economic needs of the community. Every temple in the past had a *sthala vriksha*, small or big, and people meticulously saw to it that the tree flourished well. Then there was the temple flower garden, growing not only small plants like the jasmine, the hibiscus and the tecoma, but large trees like the bauhinia (*mandarai*), the *magizh*, the *vilva* etc. The *asvatta* worship has been noted upon separately. That is a large tree cared for by the people in general and there were a few *asvatta* worship sites in every village. Then there were thousands of the *iluppai* (*brassia*) tree on temple land and on private land, grown for their supply of oil. The mango and the jack have been *sthala vrikshas* in some temples. All these would indicate that people had in the past helped to keep their places green and cool in the name of religion. Now in the name of a secular state, the name of religion has been removed from all our public activites, and whatever be the activity, be it cultural or economic, it never gives any tangible results. The reason is that the organization of such affairs does not involve the people. So whatever vegetation we have, is there because of private effort and of the sense of aesthetics of the individual.

One exception to the observasion made above is the sncces of the *teak planting* organized by the P. W. D. river conservancy section all along the banks of the major channels in the Tanjavur district and we are happy to note that it is quite a good success. This is attributable to the drive and sustaining power of the Chief Engineer in charge. A previous agricultural department head started a spate of the *punga* tree (*pongamia*) planting, because he felt the leaves of the tree were a most valuable green manure for the paddy fields; it was a good idea, but the moment he left the post, the trees also ceased to exist.

KAMBA SEVAI

This was a great village festival in the past, attendant with many values. An average householder takes a vow that he would go to Tiruppati to have a darsan of Lord Venkatesvara there, return and perform a *kamba sevai*. Accordingly in the

early days when buses did not exist but only the railway, he made a trip to the holy place with his entire family by train. Before starting he went a round of his village begging along the streets with his wife and children, dressed in yellow cloth and having the *namam*, emblem of Vishnu on his forehead. With the rice collected and the moneys presented, he commenced his journey on an auspicious day. Many people of all communities gave him their money and some other valuables to be presented to the Lord. He received them and took them carefully with him and in time dropped them into the hundi of the temple kept for the purpose. Most of the company had a tonsure at the temple. On the way his family cooked the food with the rice presented and the party never ate in hotels or in friend's houses but every where prepared its own food.

The journey, forward and return, would have taken about fifteen days even by rail. On return what is called a *Kamba Sevai* is arranged. This merely consists in invoking Lord Venkatesvara in *kamba* or pole (or pillar in the house) and in performing an elabtorate puja thereto. There is a large feast in the house where more than two hundred people partake of it.

But two more items are of paramount importance. One is the poor feeding. The *kamba sevai* attracts thousands of people from all round. All classes of people, including all the harijans of the neighbourhood. They are first given oil and powder for an oil bath. They have a good oil bath in the village tank. After the bath they all return and seat themselves in two rows along all the streets. Sometimes the number runs to even 5000. All of them are served prepared dishes of food on plantain leaves. Sambar sadam and tayir sadam are the two dishes with some side dish. Every one eats upto the capacity of his stomach and more. It should be noted that all the women also attend Serving and eating goes on upto 6 p.m.

At night they are provided with an entertainment commencing at 9 p.m and ending at 6 a.m. the next morning. This is usually a *terukkuttu* a street drama, staged by the best street dramatists of the locality like for example Kanjanur Muthu-

kumaran. His was a magic name to conjure with. The fellow was an artist to the core. And true to his profession even in the modern day, he never cared to arrive on time; sometimes even after receiving the advance money he never used to arrive at all!

Somehow he is brought and treated to half a dozen *mondais* (pots) of toddy. Meanwhile he is powdered and dressed up. He is not particular about food. With a cry of *Rajadi rajan vandene* he jumps on the stage. The audience hall is the entire street. The audience is immediately electrified. They did not come for the characters, or the dialogue, or the acting. They wanted his songs. And he sang. There was no mike then. No electric lamps. Only two gas lamps were placed on the stage. He began to sing his part. His voice reached out to the last man in the audience and held him spell bound. People were sitting in the open air, one furlong deep. Yet the last man heard him. He dominated the entire stage. The others were there because the story wanted them. He did not want anybody. When he left the stage, it was only for a pot of toddy.

As the first rays of the sun glimmered through, the play stopped. He went out and laid himself down to sleep. He might take some food during the day or he might not. He was awakened again by 8 p.m. in the night with some pots of toddy. The same acting may be gone through. The audience was always ecstatic. No actor of the silver screen could ever have the great popularity of this rustic street actor. The drama lasted for three days or for even four days. The audience swelled for the subsequent days. On the last day early morning he received his payment of 200 rupees and left with his troupe. This treat was something to remember and dream about for the audience for one year. If there was another performance of this player anywhere within a radius of twenty miles around, all the audience went there, braving such privations as food, travel or shelter.

So this is the Kamba Sevai. I had witnessed two or three in my own place in my boyhood days. But it has never been heard of after the second world war, that is after about 1939.

Feeding of course costed money but rice was available in plenty. Other groceries were mostly available locally. Cooking and serving were done by the men and women of the village. No money was involved. People were very free with their physical help and every one thought that it was a great act of merit to help a neighbour of average resources to perform this sacred ritual. It was also considered very auspicious for the whole village. All petty feuds and differences were forgotten, and a real spirit of comraderie was ushered in by this ritual.

This kamba sevai is peculiar to the Kaveri belt and might not have been heard of elsewhere.

This kamba sevai was also done by the brahmin community. Feeding in their case was brahmin *samaradanai* and of course the feeding of the dependents and farm workers of the family. There was no universal feeding here as in the case of the kamba sevai done by the velalar.

It is doubtful if today any performance can be arranged for the whole night as here. For one thing, no modern rural actor could go on singing for the entire night and without a mike and even if he does, the audience will not sit out the night. Sophistication at all levels has set in and the abandon and unalloyed joy of the *kamba sevai* is a matter of the past, to be fondly remembered by only a few. A trip to Tiruppati is no longer a sacred religious act; it has become just a commercial bargain.

ANNIVERSARY DAY

While speaking of the national festivals, we made a reference to the date of birth of Mahatma Gandhi as a national festival day, a day of the anniversary celebration of Mahatma Gandhi's birth. To this category belong the days of modern great men such as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharishi and Aravindo, the ancient Sankara and so on. A large number of such anniversary days of the great saints of the past are being celebrated today, in the temples and in the homes by Saivas and Vaishnavas and each, can well be called a great festival. The very manner of fixing

the days for the celebration af the Saints and great masters in Saivism and Vaishnavism reflects the philosophy of the respective sects. The Saivas say that their great saints were born like all other ordinary human beings in an ordinary manner. No body knows when they were born. But by their lives and living and by their achievements they had obtained divine grace and had led people along a godward path. The work they did was known to people in their own life time, and later, their very passing away was known and recorded in people's memory and people began to celebrate in later years the anniversary of their passing away as the days sacred to their memory.

But this is not so among the Vaishnavas. Some aspect of the personality of Vishnu is considered to have been born or incarnated as some alvar or saint. Hence according to the Vaishnava tradition, the saint's very birth is an *avatar*, incarnation, and gets haloed and recorded. We may not question how. Their date of possing away is of no account, because their very avatar is a matter for rejoicing and celebration. All this makes all the difference between Saivism and Vaishnavism

Besides, Siva is never born on this earth, assuming the human body, made up of the five elements; this concept has made the author of *Silappadhikaram* refer to Siva's temple as 'the temple of the One whose body is never born'. There is no incarnation for Siva. Whenever He manifests Himself to any one, the form taken is a form evolved out of His own grace, not a mortal body. On the other hand, Vishnu has ten incarnations — when he is born on earth with a mortal frame. They are the *Matsya* (fish), *Kurma* (tortoise), *Varaha* (boar), *Narasimha* (Man-lion), *Vamana* (dwarf), *Parasuiama* (Man with the axe), *Rama*, *Balarama* (the elder brother of Krishna), *Krishna*, and *Kali* (the horse faced one yet to appear). The traditional days of the birth or avatar of these forms are celebrated in all Vaishnava temples and homes. The *avatars* are said to be even twentytwo.

Commemoration of the anniversary day of an ancestor is an annual celebration in the home. When the deceased parent or grant parent is remembered out of gratitude and respect.

This is a *sraddha dina*, when rituals are gone through for the welfare of all the departed souls. The date of birth of the twelve alvar and later acharyas in Vaishnavism and the dates of the passing away of the nayanmar and later acharyas in Saivism are celebrated in orthodox households with considerable feasting and poor feeding. Part of the rituals is to present the bramins with food and food articles. Such days are numerous and they are invariably given in all the *panchangams*. It is not necessary to detail them here at length.

Such important days for the Vaishnavas will be: the dates of birth of the twelve alvar, Hanuman, and the acharyas Nathamuni, Alavandar, Ramanuja, Vedanta desika, Pillai Lokacharya and Manavala mamunihal. Similar days for the Saivas will be the days of the passing away of the 63 nayanmar including Sambandhar, Appar and Sundarar, Manikkavachakar, the four Santana acharyas from Meykandar to St. Umapati, Arunagirinathar, Pattinattar, Kumaraguruparar and Tayumanavar and the days of Saint Gurujnanasambandhar, St Namasivayamurti and Sivagrayogi, the founders of Saiva monastries in the Tanjavur district.

SOME FORGOTTEN FESTIVALS

The old order changeth so yielding place to new
And God fulfils himself in many ways
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world

wrote the 19th century English poet, Lord Tennyson. This appears to be true with regard to the festivals of Tamilnad. Many ancient festivals had been dropped or forgotten and new ones have arisen in their places. For example: the *Pongal* festival, the greatest of the modern Tamilnad festivals today might have been there in the past also, but we do not have evidence of it. So also *Dipavali*; we cannot say if it was there in the early centuries at all. From a prayer of Manimekhalai to *Chinta Devi*, Sarasvati as the Muse of Thought, we may believe that Sarasvati puja could have been there even in the Sangham age but it is not explicit. The list may go on in this manner.

Let us now consider some of the festivals mentioned in the early years, which we do not know today or have forgotten. *Silappadhikaram* sings the glory of the *Indra vizha,* celebrated in the city of Puhar, which could vie with any of the great festivals celebrated by any modern power but it has completely disappeared, probably with the washing away of the city of Puhar by the sea. Indra was the patron deity in charge of the clouds and rain and so it was quite natural that the pastoral and agricultural area of the Cholanad celebrated a festival for him. That festival, whose chief glory was a sea coast rejoicing has now been completely forgotten and we seek to equate it partially with the *Bhogi pandihai* on the last day of Marhali, which we believe celebrates Indra as Bhogi.

Nakkiranar's commentary on *Iraiyanar Kalaviyal* mentions three important festivals in the capital cities of the three crowned monarchs the *Ulli vila* for Karuvur, Capital of the Sera, *Avani avittam* for Madurai, capital of the Pandiyas, and *Panguni Uttiram* of Uraiyur capital of the Cholas.

Next we shall take up some festivals mentioned by St. Tiru Jnanasambandear in his *Poompavaippadikam.* The festiva's of nine months beginning from Purattasi are directly mentioned by him in the first nine verses and the other three months are simply suggested. He begins his song with a reference to the festival of feeding Siva's forces-Rudra-palganattar. This feeding festival of this month is unknown today. But there was a Purattasi festival in many temples Like Tiru Anandalurai where the festival commenced on Mulam and ended on Purattasi day. The next verse speaks of Aippasi *Onam vizha. Onam* is now an important modern festival of Kerala; the Tamil people do not celebrate it. If it is construed as the star Tiruvonam, we have celebrations in honour of Vishnu in Purattasi Tiruvonam and not in Aippasi. The festivals in Karttikai, Marhali, Thai, Masi and Panguni mentioned by Sambandhar are well known.

Then he mentions the *Ashtami* festival and by the sequence we may take it to refer to the month of Chitrai. We shall take it up later. The next verse refers to *Potrappu,* golden ropes,

probably Ponnusal, the golden swing for the *vasanta* festival of Vaikasi. The tenth verse speaks of *Perum-santi*, the parvitrosava done variously in the months of Ani, Adi or Avani.

Vaikasi Vasanta (spring) vizha was common in all temples like Kalathi, Virattanam etc.

Now the *ashtami vizha* in Chitrai requires special consideration. The *brahmotsava* now conducted on *Panguni uttiram* in most temples was conducted in Tiru Jnanasambandhar's days in the *Ashtami* of *Chitrai* (bright fortnight). People used to fest on the ashtami day. This Ashtami festival has copious reference in all literature, of which we shall mention one. St. Appar in his Tiru *Nerisaippadiham* (Book 4 of *Devaram*, poem 50, verse 2) says:

"My Lord of Kurukkai - virattanam, went along the streets of Kurukkai as the Dancer on the *seven* days prior to *Ashtami*, Brahma, Vishnu and the other devas folding their hands and singing His praises." (Kurukkai is a place in the Cholanad, where Siva is traditionally considered to have reduced to ashes, Manmata the god of love, for daring to aim a love dart at Him.) This Ashtami festival has now been forgotten and its function appears to have been transferred to the *Panguni Uttiram brahmotsavam*.

Ashtami was a day on which children attending schools in the ancient past were given a holiday, saying that they should *not* take to studies on that day. It was called an *anadhyaya* day. The holiday might have come into vogue because of the temple festivals which were important on this day. Corresponding to the four Sundays as holidays in each month in the modern day, There were the two *ashtami* and the new moon and the full moon days as holidays.

There could be some more such ancient festivals, now forgotten.

SIRUTTONDAR AMUDU PADAIYAL

The story of Siruttondar (the little devotee) one of the Sixty three canonized Saiva Saints is narrated in great detail by Sekkilar in his *Periya puranam*. He was a contemporary of St Appar and St. Tirujnanasambandhar who have referred to him in their songs. Early in life he was called Paranjoti and as commander of the forces of the Pallava Emperor Narasima varma I he took out an expedition against the Western Chalukyas and razed to the ground their capital city of Vatapi (modern Badami in the Maharashtra country). His devotion to Siva was recognized by the emperor and he was relieved from military service to go his way of religious service to Siva and Siva bhaktas.

His place is Tiruchengattankudi in the Nannilam taluk of the Tanjavur district where we have a fine temple sanctified by the hymns of the Saints Jnanasambandhar and Appar. His super-normal story of feeding a *Mahavrati* Sivabhakta there is famous throughout Tamilnad. There is no space here to elaborate the story or give a rational explanationto the supernatural elements there Vide my article on the Siruttondar story-of Periya puranam, published in the *Saiva Siddhantha*, Vol. 6, pages 179-187 1971. But it is remarkable that this victorious ex-commander of an emperor's forces, one of unequalled devotion and immense sacrifice, came to be called the *little servant* (of God) in the popular language, probably for want of a more expressive appellation for his her mility

The people of Tamilnad have taken to heart the great deed of Siruttondar in trying to feed the Mahavrati-bhakta on his own terms and they are annually celebrating it as a great festival. Usually the Saivas celebrate it and more often the bhaktas in the lower levels of society celebrate it with even greater dedication. The chief features of the festivals are: going the round of the village by about a score of people with a great local devotee at their head and collecting rice for cooking and feeding, bringing all the rice to the house and adding a large quantity to it, cooking it as food offering to St. Siruttondar invoked on a kalasa or pinch of sandal, *reading the verses from the*

Periya puranam to the assembled group of bhaktas and then distributing the rice to the poor and the indigent. This was a great occasion and usually the poor people assembled, beggars and wandering minstrels, would be more than five hundred strong. All of them were fed, and then only the others would sit for their meals.

When the devotees went round begging for rice, they used to carry a flag in the orange colour, called the *annakkodi* - the flag of food. All of them would have already bathed, sacred ash was smeared all over their bodies, and they wore the *rudraksha* beads round their neck. They carried large baskets for collecting rice. They had not had any food in the morning and would take some food only after 3 p.m. after all the beggars are fed. All the householders considered it a privilege to give as much rice for this noble cause as they could. The entire group would be singing songs from a song-drama of the story of the saint. I had seen this more than forty years ago and still the following lines, heard at that time, haunt me :

Hara hara Siva Siva sambo — inda
Aran adiyarkkanam alipparum undo?

(The first line is just an incantation of the names of Siva as Hara, Siva and Sambhu. The other words mean: Are there people to give food to this bhakta of Hara?

There was an occasion when I was personally involved in the Siruttondar amudu padaiyal.

Once in 1935-36, I went to my village and hearing of any arrival, I was invited to the house of a respected elder for a feast. In all innocence I agreed. It was the home of a close relative of mine bearing my own name. He had died the year before. He was always celebrating this festival annually in his house very elaborately. This was the year after his death. His son, a gentleman much older than I, was doing it now. As soon as I entered, he handed me the copy of *Periya Puranam* and asked me to read all the verses of the puranam with some explanation! I had not bargained for this. Having the book in my hand, I could not very well beat a retreat. Though I knew

the story, I could not do justice to Sekkilar. Anyway, to keep up the dignity of an educated man in the city, I waded through the lines, explaining many things on the way and successfully completed the reading.

The Amudu padaiyal of Siruttondar is celebrated on the Bharani day of Chitrai. This is on a par with Kamba Sevai mentioned earlier (page 313).

SAPTA-STHANA FESTIVAL

A festival known as Saptasthana festival is conducted in many places in the month of Chitrai. The most impartant of such places is Tiruvaiyaru. Besides we have it in Terur, Tiru Chakkarappalli, Tiru Nallur, Kanjanur, Kumbakonam, Tiru Nilakkudi, Anbil - alamturai etc., where Siva as Somaskanda is taken out in procession from the chief temple on a round of the six other temples and brought back the next morning to the place of starting. The Tiruvaiyaru *saptà-sthana* festival is a grand festival. Here the procession starts from Tiru Aiyaru, goes to Tiru Chorru turai, Tirup-Pazhanam, Tiru Vedi-kudi, Tiruk-Kandiyur, Tirup-Poonturutti and Tiru Neyttanam. A large group of devotees, formerly numbering even many hundreds, accompany the procession. The day is very hot, the roads are sandy and naturally hot and difficult to walk, yet the trekking is done. The distance covered may be twelve miles. The deities in all the temples join. All along the way, the public have water sheds where free diluted butter milk is given to all the pilgrims. The festival culminates after witnessing a *darsan* at Tiruvaiyaru in the morning. This festival in this place is famous throughout Tamil nadu and a very large number of pilgrims attend.

In all the temples where the *Sapta sthana* festival is conducted, it is the annual *brahmotsava* festival of ten days. The final day is the Sapta-sthana (seven places) tour. The deities are taken in a procession on palanquins; Tiru Aiyaru has a mirror palanquin for Siva and Sakti, and a kuskus (*vettiver*) palanquin for Tiru Nandi deva. When Aiyarappa goes to the next place, he is welcomed by the deity of that place taken out on a kuskus

palanquin. This goes on from place to place, each deity coming out on a kuskus decorated palanquin. All through the night there is the procession, culminating the next morning at Tiru Aiyaru. Thereafter each deity returns to its place.

The Sapta sthana is most famous in Tiru Aiyaru; in some places owing to many factors, it is not observed on any noticeable scale. The Kanjanur sapta-sthana connects the following seven places : Kanjanur, Tiruk-kodika, Tiruk-Kurangaduturai (south), Tiru Mangalakkudi, Tiru Alankadu (on the banks of the Kaveri,) (not the place connected with saint Karaikkal Ammaiyar), Suriyanar koil and Tiru Manturai (not the shrine near Tiruchi, sanctified by the songs of Sambandhar, but another one on the bank of the Kaveri). Of these the first four have been sung on by the Saiva saints, but not the others. Suriyanar koil is the only temple, special for Surya, like the Konarak temple of Orissa for Surya the sun god.

Tiru Chakkarapalli is another place where the sapta-sthana festival was celebrated till recently. The seven places here are Tiru Chakkarappalli, Arisvaram, Sulamangalam, Nandisvaram, Pasupatikoil Talaimangai and Tiruppullamangai. Of these only the first and the last are sanctified by the songs of the Nayanmar and not the others. The Chakkarapalli shrine is surrounded completely by Muslim colonies and there was a serious disturbance there some years back, when the festival was done, and it had to be abandoned. The other temples are not in a satisfactory condition.

The city of Kanchipuram has the same festival around seven places; they are Kachi-Ekambaram, Karonam, Anehatangapadam, Kandaram, Kachimetrali, Kachi Mayanam and Kachinerikkaraikkadu. All these are of course with in the city of Kanchipuram.

Similar concepts of seven great places are there in Tamil nadu and in Hinduism in other contexts. There are the seven Sapta Vitanga sthalas where the image of Tyagaraja is said to have appeared of itself and not chiselled by man. They are Tiru Arur, Nallaru, Nagaippattinam, Karayil, Kolili, Vaymur and Maraikkadu (Vedaranyam). Here the Lord Tyagaraja is known by different names as also His dance. All that cannot be elaborated here, for want of space.

In Hindu legends. seven shrines are reputed to confer *mukti* (salvation); they are Kasi, Gaya, Avanti, Kanchi, Ayodhya, Dwaraka and Muttra (Madura of the north). It may be noted that Kanchi is the only Tamil nadu shrine mentioned in these list of seven *mukti* Kshetras.

TANTRIC NAVARATRI

Worship of Sakti is the Sakta marga and sometimes called the Tantra marga. In this marga there are several occasions of Navaratri worship.

The Sarasvati puja or Navaratri festival which is universal is called the Sarada Navaratri celebrated in Purattasi from the first day of the bright fortnight. According to a lunar month calculation, a navaratri is to be celebrated in the summer month of Chitrai, as is used to be done during the same period of the bright fortnight. The first occurs in the *Sarat ritu* and the second in the *Vasanta ritu*. Legends would equate the two ritus (periods of two months) to the canine teeth of Yama the god of death; they are respectively said to cause the diseases like the measles and poxes in the summer season, and the diseases like cholera in the rainy season. One purpose of the two festivals would be to please Sakti as the mother of the universe and obtain freedom from the diseases.

These two are half yearly occasions. There are two more. One is in the month of Marhali dedicated to Varahi and called the Varahi Navaratri and the other is in the month of Ani, dedicated to Rajamatangini ; this is called Syamala navaratri.

All the four navaratris are celebrated on the nine days from *pratama* so *navami* (first day to the nineth day) after *Amavasya* (in the *sukla paksha*, bright fortnight). The four navaratris may be seen to occur quarterly. The main is the Purattasi Navaratsi dedicated to Chandi or Durga ; this is the Sarada Navaratrt and our Saraswati puja. The second is the Varahi Navaratri of Marhali where Varahi as Dandini is the commander of Sakti's forces. The Tamil *Varahi malai* (a short poem of about forty verses) is in praise of this aspect. The third is the Vasanta navaratri in the month of Panguni dedicated to Mahadevi or Tripura sundari. The fourth is the Syamala navaratri for Rajamatangini as Sakti's minister.

APPENDIX 1 : ADDITIONAL NOTES

The notes which follow may be read along with the text on the pages noted against each.

Vaikasi Visakam (Page 80) :

Vaikasi Visakam and Pournami coincide with the birthday of Narasimha jayanti for the Vaishnavas. It is celebrated in all Vaishnava temples and homes. Religious minded people fast on the day and have their food after temple worship. A special offering of *panakam* (a drink of jaggery water in which pulses are boiled) is made.

Raksha Bandhanam (Page 109) :

It used to be said that *Raksha Bandhanam* was a festival for brahmins, *Dasarah* for the Kshatriyas, *Dipavali* for the Vaisyas, and *Holi* for the Sudras. The belief concerns only north India and it might have been born out of a desire to equate everything with the *varnas*. But it is wholly incorrect, because *raksha* or protection is necessary more for the other varnas than for the brahmins, and the Dasarah and the Dipavali can easily be seen to apply for all the *varnas* with equal force. Besides, they have no application in Tamilnad where the particular four varna system of the north has no validity and *raksha bandhanam* does not have that much currency here. *Dasarah* and *Dipavali* are the glorious festivals of all the communities here, some of them giving and the others receiving.

Vinayaka Chaturthi (Pages 110-122) :

Many forms of Ganesa in different names are popular in the Tamil nadu. *Karpaka* Vinayaka is a form in Chidambaram and many other places. He is considered to be very bounteous in his gifts to his devotees, even like the celestial *karpaka* tree which is legendarily considered to give any boon to one who prays under its shade. Ganesa is known for his pot belly and the form is known as *Mukkuruni arisi Pillaiyar* in Chidambaram and

Madurai. He is very big in size and naturally his belly also is very big; it would call for a rice offering made of *mukkuruni* of rice (six Madras measures of rice).

The Pillaiyarpatti Vinayakar temple in Ramnad is an ancient rock cut temple and historically important. The temple is said to have been constructed by the Pandiyas in the sixth century and as such it is claimed to be pre-Pallavan. Probably the earliest rock cut Siva temple known, this deserves special mention here. The place takes its name from the sub-temple of Pillaiyar (Vinayaka) in the main temple. This Pillaiyar is a Valampuri Ganapati (with a right twisted proboscis) and he has only two arms. Usually he is portrayed with four arms and counting the probosis as a fifth arm, he is always known as the five armed (*Ainkaran*). Portrayal with two arms attaches naturally greater antiquity to this Ganapati. The temple is of course a Siva temple but because of the prominence of Karpaka Vinayaka there, the village tself has come to be called in his honour as Pillaiyarpatti.

There is a rule that one should not look at the moon on the Vinayaka Chaturthi night. Once Vinayaka was dancing on that day at a slow pace. So the devas offered Him worship in a pious manner while Chandran (the moon) laughed at this and jocularly imitated the slow dance. Vinayaka of course cursed him. From that day no one ever looks at the moon on the Vinayaka Chaturthi day. Krishna looked at the moon on this day and suffered for it.

The Mount of Lakshmi (Page 122) :

Normally no one would think of the owl as the mount of Lakshmi. But it is in fact worshipped in Bengal during Lakshmi Puja as the mount of Goddess Lakshmi. The owl, though an object of great scorn and contumely because of its natural habits, and protuberant eyes and short beak, it is yet considered to be a symbol of intelligence and to be capable of foretelling events, not only in Hindu mythology but also in Greek and Roman mythologies. In our midst however, the owl is the bad omen, the fore-teller of evil, a symbol of darkness and disgrace.

Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity is also associated with the three *gunas*. When she is in the *Satva* mood, she is the Supreme power of good and then she travels with Vishnu mounted on his Garuda. Under *Rajoguna* she rides the elephant as Gajalakshmi. When associated with *Tamoguna*, she rides the owl, called *uluka*; this is the darker aspect of wealth which is characterised by dishonesty, avarice and such base qualities. *Uluka* carries Lakshmi amidst darkness blinding people by her dazzling brilliance of form, resulting in greed and avarice. The higher values of wealth namely that it is for social good are forgotten and its base qualities predominate, resulting in destruction all round.

The following is a sort of prayer to the Uluka, the mount of Lakshmi :

O clever Uluka, Ranger of Darkness,
Take us saftly through the dark alleys
Of greed and sin, that the lustre of
Lakshmi whom you carry may not blind us.

Naga Panchami (page 122-125) :

This is reported to be yet a unique and live festival in the village of Shirala near Sangli in Maharashtra. The entire village actively takes part in catching live serpents and conducting the festival on the *panchami* day. A fortnight earlier, all the people go to the ant hills and snake holes where snakes are known to inhabit. By inserting into the hole a frog tied at the end of a small stick, they induce the snake to come out to catch the frog, and they manage to catch into pots about 250 cobras and thrice as many non-poisonous serpents. These are then fed well till the *panchami* day. There is a temple called *Ambabai* temple in the village where the devotees take the serpent pots, after a bath and self purification. The serpents are let out, the archaka smears some *kumkum* on them and they are given some milk and honey. Then the serpents are said to crawl before the houses, where they are worshipped with a *karpura harati* by the women folk. There is a procession when the serpents are taken on bullock carts along the streets of the village. An image of the Naga deity also goes with the procession. This

ends the Naga Panchami festival. The next day the serpents are let out from the pots to go and reside in their holes as before. This festival is said to have been taking place for more than 200 years. The serpents have never bit any one during the festival. This is unknown in Tamil nadu.

Avani Mulam (pages 130-131) :

This is also called a *pittu* (pronounced *puttu*) festival in honour of the *pittu* handed out by the old woman Vandi. It is very popular in Madurai on this day, just like the *kali* on the Ardra darsana day in Chidambaram and other places.

Durga Puja in Bengal (Page 150) :

The *Navaratri* of Tamil nad is celebrated as the Durga Puja in Bengal. Funds are collected from the houses for conducting a public festival on one of the streets, under a newly erected *pandal*. A clay image of Durga, about six feet in height is prepared; by its sides are kept similar images of lesser size for Sarasvati, Lakshmi, Ganesa and Karttik (Subrahmanya). Ganesh is there, a married god, while Karttik is a bachelor. The images are installed there on the shashti day. Durga's mount is the lion; owl for Lakshmi, swan for Sarasvati, shrew for Ganesa and peacock for Karttik. On the next three days, *saptami*, *ashtami* and *navami*, men and women strew flowers on the deities and perform their worship to the accompaniment of the conch, in the pandal. The priest chants the mantras. Durga is portrayed in the Mahishasura mardhini form; the priest does her puja six times a day. People put on new garments and go about visiting the pandals in the other localities and offering worship. The best installed Durga gets a prize. On the Vijaya dasami day, Durga is taken to the Ganges and consigned to the waters, as we in Tamil nad do after Ganesa chaturthi.

Lakshmi puja is done a few days after, on the pournami day, in the same pandal, with a newly made image. A modest puja without pomp is done for her and the image is consigned to the Ganges at midnight. One should not see this; the belief is that he will be stricken with poverty.

Panguni Uttiram (page 156) :

Tyagaraja is the presiding form of Siva in the great temple of Tiru Arur. He is just another form of Somaskanda murti, where his complete form including his hands and feet are all covered with cloth upto the neck. Only the face is exposed to the darsan of the devotees. The feet of God is important in all Saivism as they represent *arul*, His grace, and all floral *archana* etc. are directed towards the feet. Now at Tiru Arur the feet of Lord Tyagaraja is uncovered for the darsan of the devetees on this day, the Panguni Uttiram day, and this is an important day in the festivals of Tiru Arur.

Dipavali (page 168 :)

Dipavali is the Kali puja day in Bengal. It is similar to Durga worship under a pandal during Navaratri. Lighting of candles (dipa-avali) is important. There was formerly animal sacrifice, which has been stopped now.

Kadai Muzhukku (page 176) :

On the first day of the Tula masa, the month of Aippasi, Brahaspati is said to enter the *tula rasi*, *libra* and this is said to be the *Kaveri pushkara*. The bath in the whole month is called the *Tula-Muzhukku ;* the last day's bath being very sacred, is called *Kadai* (last day) *muzhukku.* The *pushkaram* (river baths) assigned to the 12 different months are as follows: when Brhaspati enters the zodiac *Mesha*, the *pushkara* celebration commences for the Ganga; *Vrishabha*-Narmada (also called Reva); *Mithuna*-Sarasvati (river). *Karkataka*-Yamuna. *Simha*-Godavari (the famous pushkaram at Rajamundry once in twelve years). *Kanya*-Krishna (the Vijayavada pushkaram). *Tula*-Kaveri; *Vrischika*-Tamraparni ; *Dhanus*-Sindhu; *Makara*-Tungabhadra; *Kumbha*-Bhimavati ; *Mina*-Pranhita (probably River Tapti).

The Pavai Festival or the pre-Dawn Bath (Page 189) :

The Sangham poems like *Ainkurnnuru* (verse 84), Kalittohai (59) and *Paripadal* (11) mention the bath with reference to the month of *Thai.* Andal's song (first verse of *Nachiyar*

Tirumoli) speaks of it in detail; people clean the floor and wash it and deck it with *kolam* for the festival in connection with a celebration for Kamadeva. Probably the modern *Marhali-niradal* might have been the *Thai-niradal* of the past.

Bath on the Pusam in Thai is celebrated in *Devaram*. The very thought of the city of Tiru Idai marudur evokes the Pusam festival in the minds of Sambandhar and Appar (1.32.5 and 5.14.1 of their Devaram). Manikkavacakar associates Tiru Idai marudur with the immersion of the soul in the broad sea of Siva's Supreme Grace. Many temples have a floating festival (*Teppotsavam*) on this day.

Vaikuntha Ekadasi (Page 204) :

The story of the great king Ambarisha son of Mandhata is associated with the observane of the Ekadasi vrata (see Bhagavata, nineth skanda). Ambarisha observed many penances for Vishnu who was pleased with his devotion and gave him his own Sudarsana chakra. The king's observance of the Ekadasi vrata alarmed Indra the celestial king. He was afraid that he might become a rival for the celestial throne. Somehow he prevalied upon Sage Durvasa, notorious for his unreasonable anger and fury, to spoil the king's Ekadasi vrata. Going to Ambarisha, Durvasa was received with due respect. He then went to the River Kalindi for his morning bath, before taking his food. He stayed at the river too long so that the time of the King's completion of the Ekadasi vrata might be long over. The King had given away the offerings to the devas and the others in the usual manner, after reserving a portion for Durvasa. After some time, the sage returned but finding that others had been fed earlier than he, he was angry. He created a demon who was about to attack Ambarisha, who however invoked the Chakra of Vishnu. It appeared, destroyed the demon and advanced upon the sage. Durvasa fled out of fear. Indra, Brahma and Rudra were unable to shelter him from the fury of the Chakra. Vishnu advised him to seek shelter from Ambarisha himself which he did and thus saved himself. Such is the great power accruing from the Ekadasi vrata.

Panchagavya (Page 224) :

The *panchagavya* is mentioned in several places in the Devara hymns, besides their elaborate mention in the agamas. Their purpose is a physical purification of the internal organs. An inscription of Tiru Annamalai prescribes the proportion in which the panchagavya for the early morning bath of Siva there is to be prepared. "Milk is one and one fourth *nali* (the) measure itself named Tiru Annamalai), curds *nali* and *uri*, cow-dung is one eighth of a *nali*, cow's urine is *ulakku* or one fourth of a *nali*, and ghee one *nali*."

Tiruk-Kalyanam (Pages 252, 268) :

It is generally said that the *Tirukkalyana* ritual of the temple on the seventh day, between Siva and Sakti in the *brahmotsava* festival, is to indicate to the world the manner in which marriage rituals are to be conducted in society. The temple ritual, as is well known, has been laid down in the Agamas and had been conducted probably for the last two millennia without any change. Following the agamas it has been well described in *puranas* like that of *Kanchi*, *Madurai* and many others. The following details may just be indicated.

The bridegroom's party goes to the place of the bride and arranges the marriage. The wedding takes place in the bride's place. There is a lot of deviation in this. In some landed aristocracies, it is not dignified to have the marriage in the bride's place. But in all modern society the bridegroom's party are out to fleece the bride's family and so marriages are conducted at the bride's place, so that her people should bear the burden of the expenses. An auspicious day for marriage is fixed upon. The bridegroom is brought to the bride's house. *Palum-palamum* (milk and fruits) are given to the bridgegroom. He is placed on a seat, the bride fully decked is brought and seated by his side. Her hand is placed on his hand, and her father pours water in token of having given her to him. People strew *akshata* and flowers on the couple. A fire is lit, the *tirumangalya* is tied on the neck of the bride by the bridegroom, and the two together pour puffed rice on the fire. Gifts to the elders (*dana*) are made. Circumambulation of the fire is done by

the two. The bridegroom places the foot of the bride on the *ammi* (grinding stone) and points to Arundati in the heavens. The ceremonies are over and there is a procession of the couple along the main streets of the village. Many of these details are still followed in society; some have been discarded while new features have been added.

However, one popular convention merits our attention. Although we have said that in the landed aristocracy of the past, it was a matter of pride and prestige to have the wedding function celebrated in the bridegroom's house and although this is indeed true, religious convention gives pride of place to the female sex. The marriage celebrations and *kalakshepam*, are called *Sita kalyanam*, *Rukmini parinayam*, *Valli parinayam*, *Kamakshi kalyanam*, *Minakshi kalyanam*, *Parvati parinayam* and so on. The very names of the deities are Sitaraman, Radhakrishnan, Uma Mahesvaran, Parvati Paramesvaran, Lakshmi Narayanan and so on, and never the other way round as Rama Sita, Krishna Radha and so on. We would like to point out that this is not a matter of mere convention but a matter of a deep culture which gives prominence in the matter of marriage to woman. From the Sangham age in Tamil literary history we see that marriage is important to woman, where man may freely roam about as an indisciplined animal.

Aippasi Onam (page 319) :

The Aippasi Onat-Tiruvizha has been noted here as a forgotten festival. True. But in the days of Rajaraja I, we find an inscriptiou in Tiruvizhimizhalai refering to this festival there. An inscription records the fact of grant of money for feeding the pilgrims who arrive for participating in this festival. The modern Onam festival of Kerala, the former Seranad of the Tamil people, is being celebrated by the Keralites with great eclat today, but in the month of Avani. Probably, it is reminiscent of this Aippasi Onam. The possibility of its being the same as the *Ulli vizha* of Panguni has also been discussed in the paragraphs under Some Ancient Festivals (page 310).

Anadhyaya day (Page 320) :

Day of non-study. This did not mean that no study was done on these days. It meant only that no new lesson was begun on those days. The old studies, or the usual *adhyayana*, repetition of the Vedic lessons learnt, were of course continued without break.

Besides these four days, the fourteenth day in the dark fortnight *Krishna Chaturdasi*, was also a holiday. Thus there were five holidays in a month for the pupil. By a strange coincidence the five days correspond to the four Sundays plus a second Saturday in modern times, making a total of five holidays for office goers. As in the case of the second Saturday which gives two consecutive days of holidays along with the Sunday which is the next day, in the past also we had this *chaturdasi* and the next day *amavasya* making two consecutive holidays. How modern the ancients appear to have been !

Saptashana festival (Page 324):

The Chakkarappalli Saptasthana festival is celebrated two days after Panguni Uttram. The sapamata-Brahmi, Mohesvari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Indrani and Chemundi res-pectively-are considered to have worshipped in the seven shrines mentioned here.

APPENDIX 2 : NOTES AND REFERENCES

Given below are some of the original Tamil verses etc. quoted or mentioned in the text, for the sake of those who may be intstered in seeing the originals.

Page 69 : சுப்பிரமணிய பாரதி : தேசிய கீதங்கள் :
'போகின்ற பாரதமும் வருகின்ற பாரதமும்' :

போகின்ற பாரதத்தைச் சபித்தல்

வலிமையற்ற தோளினய் போ போ போ
மார்பிலே ஒடுங்கினய் போ போ போ
பொலிவிலா முகத்தினய் போ போ போ
பொறியிழந்த விழியினய் போ போ போ.

வேறு வேறு பாஷைகள் கற்பாய் நீ
வீட்டு வார்த்தை கற்கிலாய் போ போ போ
நூறு நூல்கள் போற்றுவாய், மெய்கூறும்
நூலிலொத் தியல்கிலாய் போ போ போ.

சாதி நூறு சொல்லுவாய் போ போ போ
தருமமொன் றியற்றிலாய் போ போ போ
நீதி நூறு சொல்லுவாய் காசொன்று
நீட்டினல் வணங்குவாய் போ போ போ.

வருகின்ற பாரதத்தை வாழ்த்தல்

ஒளிப டைத்த கண்ணினய் வா வா வா
உறுதி கொண்ட நெஞ்சினய் வா வா வா
களிப டைத்த மொழியினய் வா வா வா
கடுமை கொண்ட தோளினய் வா வா வா
தெளிவு பெற்ற மதியினய் வா வா வா
சிறுமை கண்டு பொங்குவாய் வா வா வா
எளிமை கண்டு இரங்குவாய் வா வா வா
ஏறு போல்ந டையினய் வா வா வா.

கற்ற லொன்று பொய்க்கிலாய் வா வா வா
கருதிய தியற் றுவாய் வா வா வா
ஒற்றுமைக்கு ளுய்யவே நாடெல்லாம்
ஒருபெ ருஞ்செயல் செய்குவாய் வா வா வா.

The English is adapted from Dr. Prema Nandakumar.

Page 87 : Verses 6, 20 and 61 of *Arputat-Tiru Antadi* of Karaikkal Ammaiyar (11th Book of the Saiva Canon) :

வானத்தான் என்பாரும் என்க, மற் றும்பர்கோன்
தானத்தான் என்பாரும் தாமென்க: — ஞானத்தான்
முன்னஞ்சத் தால் இருண்ட மெய்யொளிசேர் கண்டத்தான்
என்நெஞ்சத் தான் என்பன் யான்.

அறிவானுந் தானே, அறிவிப்பான் தானே,
அறிவாய் அறிகின்றான் தானே, — அறிகின்ற
மெய்ப்பொருளுந் தானே, விரிசுடர்பார் ஆகாயம்
அப்பொருளுந் தானே அவன்.

அன்றுந் திருவுருவங் காணாதே ஆட்பட்டேன்,
இன்றுந் திருவுருவங் காண்கிலேன் :- என்றுந்தான்
'எவ்வுருவோ னும்பிரான், என்பார்கட்கென் னுரைக்கேன் ?
எவ்வுருவோ நின் னுருவம் ஏது ?

Page 94 : *Silappadhikaram, Kanalvari* ; Verse 25 :

மருங்கு வண்டு சிறந்தார்ப்ப மணிப்பூ வாடையது போர்த்துக்
கருங்க யற்கண் விழித்தொல்கி நடந்தாய் வாழி காவேரி!
கருங்க யற்கண் விழித்தொல்கி நடந்தவெல்லாம் நின்கணவன்
திருந்து செங்கோல் வளையாமை அறிந்தேன்வாழி காவேரி.

Page 108 : Periyalvar *Tirumoli, Talapparuvam* 1. 3. 1 :

மாணிக்கங் கட்டி வயிரம் இடைகட்டி
ஆணிப்பொன் னாற்செய்த வண்ணச் சிறுதொட்டில்
பேணி உனக்குப் பிரமன் விடுதந்தான்
மாணிக் குறளனே தாலேலோ,
வையம் அளந்தானே தாலேலோ.

Page 123 : Bharati, *Vinayakar Nanmanimalai*, Verse 25 :

நமக்குத் தொழில்கவிதை, நாட்டிற் குழைத்தல்,
இமைப்பொழுதுஞ் சோரா திருத்தல், — உமைக்கினிய
மைந்தன் கணநாதன் நம்குடியை வாழ்விப்பான்,
சிந்தையே ! இம்மூன்றும் செய்.

Page 136 : Periyalvar *Tirumoli, Padadikesam*, 1.2.1 :

சீதக் கடலுள் அமுதன்ன தேவகி
கோதைக் குழலாள் அசோதைக்குப் போத்தந்த
பேதைக் குழவி பிடித்துச் சுவைத்துண்ணும்
பாதக் கமலங்கள் காணீரே,
பவள வாயீர் வந்து காணீரே.

Page 149 : Desika Vinayakam Pillai, *Malarum Malaiyum* (Collected Poems) :

நாடிப் புலங்கள் உழுவார் கரமும், நயவுரைகள்
தேடிக் கொழிக்கும் கவிவாணர் நாவும், செழுங்கருணை
ஓடிப் பெருகும் அறிவாளர் நெஞ்சும் - உவந்து நடம்
ஆடிக் களிக்கும் மயிலே ! உன் பாதம் அடைக்கலமே.

Page 150 : *Silappadhikaram, Vettuva vari*, Verse 8 :

ஆனைத்தோல் போர்த்துப் புலியி னுரியுடுத்துக்
கானத் தெருமைக் கருந்தலைமேல் நின்றாயால்
வானோர் வணங்க மறைமேல் மறையாகி
ஞானக் கொழுந்தாய் நடுக்கின்றி யேநிற்பாய்.

Page 152 : *Manimekhalai*, Chapter 14 : lines 17-20 :

சிந்தா தேவீ ! செழுங்கலை நியமத்து
நந்தா விளக்கே ! நாமிசைப் பாவாய் !
வானோர் தலைவீ ! மண்ணோர் முதல்வீ !
ஏனோர் உற்ற இடர்களை வாய்!

Page 179 : *Silappadhikaram, Kanalvari*, Verse 26 :

பூவர் சோலை மயிலாலப் புரிந்து குயில்க ளிசைபாடக்
காமர் மாலை யருகசைய நடந்தாய் வாழி காவேரி!
காமர் மாலை யருகசைய நடந்தவெல்லாம் நின்கணவன்
நாம வேலின் திறங்கண்டே அறிந்தேன் வாழி காவேரி.

Page 190 : St. Andal, *Tiruppavai* 27 :

கூடாரை வெல்லும்சீர்க் கோவிந்தா! உன்தன்னைப்
பாடிப் பறைகொண்டு யாம் பெறு சம்மானம்
நாடு புகழும் பரிசினால் நன்றாக
சூடகமே தோள்வளையே தோடே செவிப்பூவே

பாடகமே யென் றனைய பல்கல னும் யாமணிவோம்
ஆடை யுடுப்போம் அதன் பின்னே பாற்சோறு
மூட நெய்பெய்து முழங்கை வழிவாரக்
கூடி யிருந்து குளிர்ந்தேலோ ரெம்பாவாய்.

Page 191 : *Tiruvacakam, Tiru Empavai* 20 :

போற்றி அருளுகநின் ஆதியாம் பாதமலர்
போற்றி அருளுகநின் அந்தமாஞ் செந்தளிர்கள்
போற்றியெல் லாவுயிர்க்கும் தோற்றமாம் பொற்பாதம்
போற்றியெல் லாவுயிர்க்கும் போகமாம் பூங்கழல்கள்
போற்றியெல் லாவுயிர்க்கும் ஈறும்இணையடிகள்
போற்றிமால் நான்முகனும் காணாத புண்டரிகம்
போற்றியாம் உய்யஆட் கொண்டருளும் பொன்மலர்கள்
போற்றியாம் மார்கழிநீ ராடேலோ ரெம்பாவாய்.

Page 198-9 : Siddhanta Sastras, *Unmai Vilakkam* :
Verses 34, 35, 36 :

ஓங்கார மேநல் திருவாசி உற்றதனில்
நீங்கா எழுத்தே நிறைசுடராம்—ஆங்காரம்
அற்றார் அறிவர்அணி அம்பலத்தான் ஆடலிது
பெற்றார் பிறப்பற்றார் பின்.

தோற்றம் துடியதனில், தோயும் திதிஅமைப்பில்,
சாற்றியிடும் அங்கியிலே சங்காரம்,—ஊற்றமா
ஊன்று மலர்ப்பதத்தில் உற்றதிரோ தம், முத்தி
நான்ற மலர்ப்பதத்தே நாடு.

மாயை தனைஉதறி, வல்வினையைச் சுட்டு, மலம்
சாய அமுக்கி, அருள் தானெடுத்து, — நேயத்தால்
ஆனந்த வாரிதியில் ஆன்மாவைத் தானழுத்தல்-
தானெந்தை யார்பரதம் தான்.

Page 201 : Mahatma Gandhi on Nandanar :

"When I heard and read the story of Nandanar and his lofty satyagraha, and his great success, my head bowed before his spirit, and all day long I have felt elevated to be able to be in a place hallowed by the holy feet of Nanda— Nanda broke down every barrier and won his way to freedom not by brag, not by bluster, but by the purest form of self-suffering. He did not swear against his perscutors,

he would not even condescend to ask his persecutors for what was his due. But he shamed them into doing justice by his lofty prayer, by the purity of his character, and, if one may put it in human language, he compelled God Himself to descend, and made Him open the eyes of his persecutors. And what Nanda did in his time and in his own person, it is open to every one of us to do today in our own person".

— *Mahatma Gandhi.*

Page 203 : *Muttollayiram*, Invocatory verse :

மன்னிய நாள்மீன் மதிகனலி என்றிவற்றை
முன்னம் படைத்த முதல்வனைப்—பின்னரும்
'ஆதிரையான் ஆதிரையான்' என்றென்று அயருமால்
ஊர்திரை நீர் வேலி உலகு.

Page 217 : *Silappadhikaram*, Chapter 1 : lines 4-6 :

ஞாயிறு போற்றுதும் ஞாயிறு போற்றுதும்
காவிரி நாடன் திகிரிபோற் பொற்கோட்டு
மேரு வலந்திரித லான்.

Page 225 : St. Sambandhar, *Poompavaippadikam*, verse 5 (*Devaram* Book 2, song 47) :

மைப்பூசு மொண்கண் மடநல்லார் மாமயிலைக்
கைப்பூசு நீற்றான் கபாலீச் சரமமர்ந்தான்
நெய்ப்பூசு மொண்புழுக்கல் நேரிழையார் கொண்டாடும்
தைப்பூசங் காணாதே போதியோ பூம்பாவாய்.

Page 235 : *Ibid.* Verse 6 :

மடலார்ந்த தெங்கின் மயிலையார் மாசிக்
கடலாட்டுக் கண்டான் கபாலீச் சரமமர்ந்தான்
அடலானே றூரும்·அடிக ளடிபரவி
நடமாடல் காணாதே போதியோ பூம்பாவாய்.

Page 245 : St. Andal, *Nachiyar Tirumoli* 1.2 :

வெள்ளை நுண்மணற் கொண்டு தெருவணிந்து
வெள்வரைப் பதன்முன்னம் துறைபடிந்து
முள்ளு மில்லாச் சுள்ளி யெரிமடுத்து
முயன்றுன்னை நோற்கின்றேன், காமதேவா!

கள்ளவிழ் பூங்கணை தொடுத்துக் கொண்டு
கடல்வண்ண னென்பதோர் பேரெழுதி
புள்ளினை வாய்பிளந்தா னென்பதோர்
இலக்கினில் புகவென்னை யெய்கிற்றியே.

Page 254: *Ahananuru* 368, by Marudan Ilanaganar, lines 16-19.

........வாழி தோழி, கொங்கர்
மணியரை யாத்து மறுகின் ஆடும்
உள்ளி விழவின் அன்ன
அலரா கின்றது பலர்வாய்ப் பட்டே

Page 310 : St. Sambandhar, *Poompavaippadikam*, 8 :

தண்ணு வரக்கன்தோள் சாய்த்துகந்த தாளினன்
கண்ணார் மயிலைக் கபாலீச் சரமமர்ந்தான்
பண்ணார் பதினெண் கணங்கள்தம் அட்டமிநாள்
கண்ணாரக் காணுதே போதியோ பூம்பாவாய்.

Page 320 : St. Appar, Book 4, Song 50 verse 2 :

ஆத்தமாம் அயனுமாலும் அன்றிமற் றொழிந்ததேவர்
சோத்தமெம் பெருமானென்று தொழுதுதோத் திரங்கள்சொல்லி
தீர்த்தமாம் அட்டமீமுன் சீருடை ஏழுநாளும்
கூத்தராய் வீதிபோந்தார் குறுக்கைவீ ரட்டனாரே.

APPENDIX 3: TABLE OF MONTHS

The following table will give the names of the Tamil months with their Sanskrit equivalents and the corresponding months in the Gregorian calendar.

Tamil	*Lunar*	*Zodiacal*	*Western Name*	*Gregorian*
1. Chitrai	Chaitra	Mesha	Aries	April-May
2. Vaikasi	Vaisaka	Rshabha	Taurus	May-June
3. Ani	Sreshta	Mituna	Gemini	June-July
4. Adi	Ashada	Karkkataka	Cancer	July-August
5. Avani	Sravana	Simha	Leo	August-September
6. Purattasi	Bhadrapada	Kanni	Virgo	September-October
7. Ayppasi	Asvayuj	Tulam	Libra	October-November
8. Karttikai	Karttika	Vrischika	Scorpio	November-December
9. Marhali	Margasira	Dhanus	Sagittarius	December-January
10. Thai	Pushya	Makaram	Capricorn	January-February
11. Masi	Magha	Kumbham	Aquarius	February-March
12. Panguni	Phalguna	Minam	Pisces	March-April

Usually the Tamil months begin near the middle of the English month, by the 13th or 14th and the Zodiacal month by the 21st of each month.

GLOSSARY

Abhishēka	bathing the image of God with water and other prescribed articles.
ācārya	spiritual preceptor.
ādhāra	mystic nerve centre.
advaita	a system of philosophy; oneness or non-dual union.
āgama	Śaiva scripture, sacred like the veda.
agni	fire.
ahimsa	non-violence.
alankāram	decoration.
āḷvār	Vaishna saint.
āḷvār prabandham	Vaishnava canon of hymns.
ambāḷ, amman	Sakti, Siva's consort.
ammai	mother.
amāvāsya	new moon day.
amrta	nectar.
ānanda	bliss.
annadāna	distribution of free food.
annam	food.
anugraha	grace of God.
anuṣṭhana	daily religious rites of the initiated person.
ārādhana	worship.
arcaka	temple priest.
arcana	floral worship.
aṛuhu	common hariali grass.
āsana	seat.
āśrama	one of the four stages in Hindu life.
asura	demon.
asvatta	pipal tree.
astra dēva	trident of Siva, with His miniature figure in the centre used as his deputy in tirttavari.
ātmā	soul.
āvāhana	invocation of a deity on a chosen object.
avatāra	incarnation.
āvuḍaiyār	the circularpiece of stone of the Sivalinga on which the bana is mounted;-some times square also.
āyar	cowherd.
āyudham	tool, weapon.

Bāṇa	pilar like cylindrical central part of the Siva linga.
bhakta	devotee, worshipper.
bhakti	devotion.
bhāṣya	commentary on a religious book.
brahmōtsava	great annual temple festival of ten days.
Caṇḍāla	one of the lowest caste.
carya	the first of the four pathways to God.
catram	dharmasala, public free lodging and feeding house.
citrānnam	variety of prepared rice dishes.
Dāna	gift.
darśan	seeing, vision of God.
dēva	a celestial.
dēvāram	songs of the Saiva acharyas Tiru Jñanasambandhar, Appar and Sundarar.
dēvatā	deity.
dēvi	goddess, Sakti.
dharma	righteousness, duty and virtue.
dhūpa	offering of incense.
dhyāna	meditation
dīkṣa	spiritual initiation.
dīpa	lamp.
Ganēśa	Vinayaka, the remover of obstacles-Vignesvara, the elephant-headed son of Siva in the legends.
garbha graha	inner most sanctum in the temple.
gāyatri	sacred mantra uttered in daily japa and prayer.
gōpi	a maid of the cowherd clan devoted to Krishna.
gōpura	the tall tower over the entranee to a temple.
grahasta	house-holder.
guru	spiritual preceptor.
Harijan	a term introduced by Gandhi to denote one of the lowest caste in society (literally a child of God, Hari).
Hinduism	a name applied to all the vaidika religions of India.
Itihāsa	epic like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.
Japa	meditational repetition of God's name.

jayanti	birthday.
jnāna	divine knowledge, spiritual wisdom.
Kabaddi	a rural game of India.
kalasa	pot, small potlike dome, cupola.
kāppu	protection; an armlet worn for this purpose.
karaham	decorated pot in the water of which a particular deity is invoked.
karināḷ	inauspicious day.
karpūram	camphor
karmā	action, the doctrine that one has to reap the fruits of his action.
kāvaḍi	a short ornamental cross-bar across the shoulders at each end of which hangs a basket containing temple offerings such as rice and milk.
kōil	temple.
kōlam	a floral decoration done with rice flour on the floor of a house on a festive ceremony.
kōlāttam	a play of children beating short sticks in the hand and marking time to a song.
kīrttana	musical compositions in praise of God.
kolu	arrangement of dolls etc. on several steps to symbolize the durbar of Sakti.
kumbha	pot.
kumkum	vermilion powder worn by women on the central fore-head as a mark of auspiciousness.
kuṃmi	a play of girls accempanied by rhythmic singing and dancing.
kuttuviḷakku	a standing brass lamp with five faces lit during puja occasions.
Lakshmi	goddess of prosperity, consort of Vishnu.
līla	sport.
linga	form of Siva.
Mahā	great.
mahātmā	great soul.
mahēśvara pūja	worship of the devotees of Siva.
maṇḍapam	hall.
mantra	mystic syllable, sacred formula.
mārga	path.
māsa	month.

māyā	illusion
mōdaka	sweet pudding in round form.
mōksha	liberation.
mukti	liberation.
mūrti	image of a deity.
mutt, **math**	monastery.
Nāga	serpent.
nāgasvaram	traditional pipe instrument for temple music.
Natarāja	Siva as the cosmic Dancer.
nava dhānya	nine cereals.
nāyanar	canonised Saiva saint.
neivēdyam	food offering to God.
nirvāṇa	state of salvation.
nir-mōr	watery butter milk.
nonbu	observance of a vow or vrath.
Padam	musical composition in praise of God written in an erotic vein.
padma	lotus.
pakṣa	fortnight
pallāṇḍu	benediction wishing long life.
pūṇool	sacred thread.
paṇ	musical melody.
pāṇa	member of an ancient community of people given to dance and music but considered low in caste.
pancākṣara	the five mystic syllables of Siva.
panchāngam	almanac.
pandal	a temporary flat caropy of plaited coconut leaves erected over poles.
panḍihai	festival.
paramātma	the Supreme Self.
pativrata	a chaste woman who worships none expect her husband.
pāyasam	a sweet dish made of milk and rice, pulses etc.
Periya purāṇam	the metrical biography of the Saiva saints written by Sekkilar.
pongal	rice food boiled with pulses; sankaranti day.
pourṇima	**full moon day.**

Praṇava	the primordial sound ỌM.
prākāram	concentric courtyards round the temple.
prasādam	presentations to devotee of food, fruits, flowers and sacred ash offered to God.
prēma	love.
pūja	worship.
Prasthana traya	the three basic scriptures of Hinduism in Sanskrit - the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and the Gita.
puṇya	merit accruing through the performance of good deeds.
purāṇa	book of ancient legends.
purōhit	priest.
Raksha	protective talisman.
rudrākṣa	the seeds of the eloeocarpus tree said to represent tear drops from Siva and used by the Saivas as beads in their rosary.
Sādam	rice food.
saiva	follower of Siva.
sakti	Supreme Energy as the consort of Siva.
sannyāsi	an ascetic.
sāstra	scripture.
satcitānanda	the Absolute conceived as True Existence Intelligence and Bliss.
satyāgraha	holding fast to Truth.
siddha	realized soul.
Śiva	the Absolute, the Brahman, the Supreme Being in Saivism.
Śivāchārya	gurukkal, the priest entitled to perform Siva puja in the temple.
Śivalinga	the symbol of Siva in the sanctum of the temple.
slōka	Sanskrit verse.
sraddha	anniversary ceremony performed for an ancestor.
stōtra	hymn of praise.
suddha	pure.
sumangali	a married woman whose husband is alive.
sūtra	aphorism in a religions text.
Tāli	symbol of marriage worn round the neck on a thread or chain worn by women, *tirumāngalya.*

tāmbūlam	betels.
tāṇḍava	dance.
tapas	penance.
tarppaṇa	libation of water to the manes.
tilaka	mark worn on the central forehead.
tingaḷ	moon, month, Monday.
tīrtta	sacred tank or river.
tirttavari	ceremonial immersian of a temple image the tirtta at the culmination of a festival.
tiru	celebrated, sacred.
tirumāngalya	*tāli*.
tiruppuhaḷ	rhythmic songs on Muruha sung by Saint Arunagiri nāthar.
tōraṇa	festoon.
tulasi	basil.
Udukkai	a small hand drum with two sides taperin in the middle.
upacāra	honour or feticitation shown to a deity guest.
Upāniṣad	the philosophical section of the Vedas.
upāsana	favourite internal worship.
upavīta	sacred thread.
utsava	temple festival
Vaḍai	cake of pulses baked in oil.
vāhana	mount, conveyance.
vastra	cloth
vaidika	follower of the veda.
vaiṣṇava	follower of Vishnu.
vara dakṣiṇa	dowry.
vēda	the most sacred book of divine revelation and knowledge for the Hindus.
vibhūti	sacred ash
vigraha	image in stone or in bronze.
vilva	bael leaf.
vimāna	tower over a sanctum in a temple.
Viṣṇu	Supreme Beirg of the Vaishnvas
vrata	religious observance.
Yāga	sacrifice.
yāḷ	an ancient musical instrument of Tamil-naud, like the vina.
yōga	thought and mind control.

INDEX

ERRATA

Page	*Line*	*For*	*Read*
6	8	being rperoductions	were reproductions
17	18	worshipped on	worshipped is
19	29-30	domes-ion	domestic functio n
33	12	aspirint	aspirant
49	30	Olakkappattin	Olakkappattu
71	7	correspodding	corresponding
	9	on	an
113	13	intrduced	introduced
12	24	Althogh	Although
130	19	bhajen	bhaje
133	33	Bhatavata	Bhagavata
134	34-5	uniyadi juruvila	uriyadi tiruvila
153	24	vriksaa	vriksha
160	26	amavasaya	amavasya
	29	celeberate	celebrate
189	4	occurence	occurrence
192	27	mevements	movements
197	29	Purttasi	Purattasi
208	19	calender	calendar
224	Last	acnhagravya	Panchagavya
229	21	iaya	jaya
249	26	Taittinya	Taittiriya
252	37	eleborately	elaborately
263	22	16th	17th
281	2	nairmalya	nirmalya
296	24	kurumani	karumani
303	8	Georoge	George
305	33	four	fifteen
319	26	Anandalurai	Anbilalan durai
334	17	Saptasthana	Saptasthana
	19	sapamata	saptamata
	20	Chamundi	Chamundi
335	4	intstered	interested

English and Tamil Books of M. Arunachalam

An Introduction to the History of Tamil Literature	40-00
Peeps into Tamil Literature:	
1. Ballad Poetry	20-00
2. A Primer of Tamil Literature	12-00
Peeps into Tamil Culture	
1. Harijan Saints of Tamil nadu	4-00
2. Outlines of Saivism	6-00
3. Festivals of Tamil nadu	40-00
Women Saints of Tamil nadu	1-25
Worship in the Saivagamas	3-00
Education in Ancient Tamil nadu	4-00
Guru Jnanasambandhar of Dharmapuram	3-00
The Kalabhras in Pandinad and their Impact on its culture and Literature- Madras University Endowment Lectures	5-00

தமிழ் இலக்கிய வரலாறு

நூற்றாண்டு முறை

ஒவ்வொரு பகுதியும் ரூ 15-00

9 ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு பகுதி-1
14 ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு
15 ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு
16 ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு பகுதி-1
16 ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு பகுதி-2
16 ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு பகுதி-3

நூற்றாண்டுகள் 10, 11, 12-1, 12-2, 13 அச்சில் இல்லை

கிடைக்குமிடங்கள் :

காந்தி வித்தியாலயம்
திருச்சிற்றம்பலம்-609204

பாரி நிலையம்
184, பிராட்வே, சென்னை-600 001.